

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Isle 95 Owner Threatens To Take Stations Off Air Because Of WAPA; Hugo Hodge Fires Back

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ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority on Monday denounced, in the strongest possible terms, a radio ad running on stations owned by Johnathan Cohen as nothing more than an outright lie and a propaganda campaign generated in a bid to win community sympathy for Mr. Cohen's chronic failure to pay for the electrical service his radio stations have utilized, a press release WAPA issued late Monday states.

In the ad, heard by The Consortium, a voice is heard announcing a 5:00 p.m. shutdown of the station for "several days" if WAPA doesn't negotiate power rates with Mr. Cohen. But just before 5:00 p.m. today, a new ad was circulated that said the stations would stay on because the Public Service Commission would be calling a meeting relative to the

issue. What exactly is the issue at hand, however, Mr. Cohen's ad never clarified.

Mr. Cohen is the owner of a network of radio stations on St. Croix which includes the popular Isle 95, 99.5 and 104.9 FM. The media mogul has had a history of delinquent accounts with WAPA dating back to 2013, which include returned checks for insufficient funds and failure to maintain numerous payment plans designed to assist his stations in remaining on the air, according to the release. Mr. Cohen's debt at times has topped \$175,000.

WAPA Executive Director/CEO Hugo V. Hodge, Jr. said today he understands and appreciates the role that all radio stations play in service to the community, especially in times of emergency. However, WAPA has a disconnect and delinquent policy that is administered fairly and across the board to all of its customers, residential and commercial.

"I am flabbergasted at the lack of tact taken by Mr. Cohen in airing an outrageous and inflammatory commercial that attempts to blame WAPA for his decision to take his stations off the air," said Mr. Hodge. "WAPA has bent over backwards for years now to work with Mr. Cohen to address his debt and keep his account up to date, which he has simply failed or refused to do."

Mr. Hodge also noted that for several months the stations have been off the WAPA grid and operating on standby generator power as Mr. Cohen has simply refused to address his debt to the public utility.

"Today's decision for the stations to go silent has nothing to do with the debt to WAPA but instead is a desperate attempt to win public sympathy where no sympathy should lie," Mr. Hodge continued. "If there is anyone whose actions are questionable and unethical, it is those of Mr. Cohen. I could not allow his baseless and grossly exaggerated claims about WAPA being the reason for the stations shutdown to go unanswered. What is contained in the radio ad is nothing but an outright deception, an argument that has no merit and could not withstand the most basic of litmus tests.

"It is truly unfortunate that the loyal listeners of these stations who have put their trust in what is imparted via these broadcast facilities are being misled in such a wanton and gross manner."

According to the release, WAPA remains available to Mr. Cohen to address his delinquency, should he desire to return electric service to his radio stations and resume broadcasting to the Virgin Islands community.

"WAPA has a policy for delinquent and troubled accounts such as Mr. Cohen's that has to be fairly enforced. The Authority simply cannot continue to allow a delinquency to grow without taking steps to collect what is owed...such a practice would be unfair to both WAPA and to those customers who pay their bills on time," Mr. Hodge concluded.