

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Gittens Requests Emergency Senate Hearing Following W.A.P.A. Board's Electric Rate Increase Approval

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Kenneth Gittens on Tuesday sent a letter to Senate President Neville James, requesting that he schedules an emergency fact-finding meeting with officials of the Water and Power Authority, to extract information relative to the status of the rate increase requested and the progress of the Propane Conversion Project in each district and for other purposes.

In the letter, Mr. Gittens said he made the request to have a Committee of the Whole hearing or a hearing in the committee of jurisdiction on behalf of ratepayers, seeking

answers from W.A.P.A. on issues that have caused great alarm in the community recently.

“My office has received a number of calls from residents concerned about the W.A.P.A. board's [recent vote during an emergency meeting to raise the base rate electricity charge](#). During that meeting, W.A.P.A. officials reportedly told the board the increase is necessary because W.A.P.A. has not been able to keep sufficient cash on hand to avoid downgrading and negative watch status in the bond markets. They said they are chronically in debt, in part because of more than \$31 million owed to them by the Virgin Islands government,” Mr. Gittens said.

The second-term Democrat said what is most troubling to him is that the rate increase, which is scheduled to take effect in July – if approved by the Public Service Commission - comes at a time when rate payers have seen the first significant decrease in recent years.

“I know our people are looking forward to the completion and implementation of the propane conversion project coupled with more reduced energy rates across the board. We’ve seen a number of delays with the implementation of that project as we wait to realize a reduction in monthly bills and it is time for answers,” Mr. Gittens concluded.