

The Virgin Islands Consortium

It's Time For Peaceful Protests In The U.S. Virgin Islands

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Over two years ago, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority promised that its expensive propane conversion project, costing well over \$150 million, would be good for the territory and its residence, and would reduce power bills by a respectable 30 percent.

Two years later and as the propane conversion is nearing its end (the conversion is 100 percent completed on St. Croix), instead of announcing promised decreases to customers' power bills, W.A.P.A. has instead sought and received increases to both residential and commercial lines.

That's what you call a slap in the face. Here you have an economy that remains anemic, a dwindled population that continues to struggle from a myriad of other factors, and after floating tens of millions in bonds that the taxpayers may wound up paying in part, WAPA [adds another price hike to power bills](#).

Elsewhere, the government is having challenges accessing the bond markets, as confidence in the V.I. government's ability to pay its covenants has eroded. A loan that was supposed to close since mid-December, 2016, is still pending as bondholders are requesting more time. If the money is not secured, there will be payless paydays in the Virgin Islands, and the government will be forced to layoff a wide swath of employees. Indeed, sooner or later, the government will need to make redundant hundreds of its employees to sustain itself.

What remains confounding about the territory's situation, is that residents, although they voice their opinions forcefully on radio talk shows and on online outlets, including The Consortium, they have yet to gather their strengths and take the streets of St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John in peaceful protest. It's far past time for some citizenry action.

How else will the government take heed and take immediate action, if nothing else has caused them to budge? For years, residents have called for the reduction of senators, if only because a territory of less than 110,000 residents does not need 15 senators, and if only to cut costs by a few million -- but that call, even after being approved through a referendum -- has fallen on death ears.

Leaders ought to lead by example. So when Governor Kenneth Mapp says that the territory's financial condition isn't near where it should be, and when we're struggling to secure \$147 million to keep the government operational, the last things the territory's leader should be considering are ceremonial vehicles to ferry him around the islands.

Maybe residents are afraid of their government? Or maybe folks are just too comfortable. But until a stand is taken, until thousands of Virgin Islanders overtake the streets of these islands -- refusing to go to work, even refusing to pay ridiculous bills after savings were promised -- and descend on the government houses, these officials will not really hear the people's cry.

Editorial Board.