The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Board Reinstates And Expands Scholarship Program

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The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority will reinstate the Alva C. Mc Farlane Scholarship program this year and expand the program to include the fields of industrial, chemical and environmental engineering, and economics.

The authority's governing board voted unanimously on Thursday to reinstate the program, which will award up to $60,000 of financial assistance towards a bachelor's degree in economics, electronics or civil, mechanical, electrical, computer, industrial, chemical, and environmental engineering. A $30,000 scholarship will be awarded each year in each island district. Each year, the Authority will identify what field, or fields, of study the scholarship will be issued for.

“The scholarship program provides financial assistance to graduating V.I. high school seniors, as well as freshmen or sophomores at the University of the Virgin Islands who are presently enrolled in or plan to enroll in an accredited engineering program,” said WAPA Executive Director Julio A. Rhymer, Sr. He noted that the scholarships aid the efforts of the Authority in maintaining highly skilled technical employees and in meeting the changing needs of the organization.

In his monthly executive director’s report, Mr. Rhymer reported that WAPA has begun a process of changing the face of the Randolph Harley Power Plant on St. Thomas, by the introduction of temporary new generation capacity, and by demolishing and removing obsolete equipment to make way for three new generating units. He said in February, WAPA embarked on initial steps to re-establish liquidity.

“We implemented the interim base rate that will produce approximately $14.5 million dollars per year. This funding will secure the acquisition of new generating units and the leasing of a temporary bi-fuel unit. This action alone represents a fuel savings to WAPA on the order of $14 million in the first year and by 2021, when the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) is fully implemented, the Authority is forecast to realize fuel savings of up to $20 million dollars per district, per year," Mr. Rhymer said. "After using the fuel tax for financing the first five to six units, the financing structure will encompass retaining a portion of the fuel savings to secure the procurement of additional units until we have replaced all existing generators with new, right-sized units in line with the recommendations of the Integrated Resource Plan.”

He also updated the board on efforts to identify solutions for projects that have been stalled due to financial constraints. Implementation of AMI projects to include payment kiosks, interactive voice response systems, meter management systems are being rolled out and implemented. WAPA has also identified the need to upgrade and or fully replace its financial management system which is unable to keep pace with the advent of sweeping technological changes at the Authority. Mr. Rhymer also spoke of ongoing efforts to minimize inherent risk. Creative financing such as the use of private placement bonds and low cost capital are being utilized to avoid the higher market rates due to present bond ratings. Work continues to obtain a working capital line and additional funding for capital projects, he added.

Board members in attendance included: Chairwoman Elizabeth Armstrong, Vice Chair Noel Loftus, Secretary Juanita Young, Gerald T. Groner, Esq., Cheryl Boynes-Jackson, Commissioner Devin Carrington and Director Marvin Pickering. Commissioner Gustav James and Hubert Turnbull were excused.