

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Opinion | Rescind WAPA's Latest Increase Now

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The latest LEAC increase must be rescinded now, given the pain that our community continues to experience. Governor Mapp requested an extension to the State of Emergency Declaration until Aug 2018. Now, ask yourselves, why would a governor seek an extension damn near a year after two hurricanes? Based on the law, there are many levels of scrutiny, evaluations, reporting requirements to justify a declaration. The extension also suggests that your state is not at an appropriate level of functioning in its day-to-day operations, i.e., power goes out weekly for an extended period.

To subject the citizens, who are still under a state of emergency until August 2018, to this increase is a very callous and insensitive act. To minimize the impact that a \$16 per month increase to ones' utility costs is also a very insensitive demeaning and humiliating

posture to assume. We have a community where the aged among us are on a fixed income. The governor stated approximately three months ago that 18,000 structures had damaged or damages to the exterior and the roofs.

A significant percent of our people continues to battle with FEMA, the insurance companies, contractors, and the gut-wrenching reality that one's domicile might never be rebuilt like the many that were never rebuilt post-hurricanes Hugo on St. Croix and Marilyn on St. Thomas. At some point, the citizenry expects those who are given much, to act as such and do the right thing by the people. There are segments of the citizens that are unemployed. There are still employees on the government rolls who make less than 23k per year, i.e., school crossing guards and home health workers at Department of Human Services. There are folks that are still living below the poverty line. So, a \$16 per month increase will be detrimental and cause additional hardship on a people that can't carry this burden any further.

This writer believes that the Legislature should enact the following law: "Whenever a State of Emergency has been declared, all semi-autonomous agencies are prohibited from raising their rates during the Declaration period."

Spring 2013, WAPA presented to the PSC, the Propane Fuel Project. They stated once the project was completed there will be a 33% decrease in our light bill. Where is the decrease that was promised to us? One day, one of these high paid executives will actually fulfill their promise to the people who actually pay their exorbitant salaries. This increase is coming at a time when we are struggling to piece our broken lives back together; another blow to the people of the Virgin Islands.

Submitted by Clarence Payne on July 5, 2018.