

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate President Novelle Francis Apologizes to WAPA for Power Outage During Committee of the Whole Hearing

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Senate President Novelle Francis on Friday apologized to the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority for what he said was the Legislature's role in the power disruption that occurred during Tuesday's Committee of the Whole hearing.

In a letter sent today to WAPA CEO Lawrence Kupfer, Mr. Francis indicated that work to correct a low voltage problem at the Capitol Building was scheduled without advance notification to Legislature leadership. Subsequently, there was no opportunity to advise the Legislature's guests and audience that the power would be briefly disrupted,

according to Mr. Francis's office.

On Wednesday, Clinton Hedrington Jr., chief operating officer of electrical system at WAPA, explained to the Consortium that the Legislature's maintenance worker wanted a voltage adjustment and called on WAPA to fix it. A WAPA crew came out, and there was a controlled switchover from WAPA power to generator and back to WAPA. When the light went out the first time while Sen. Kurt Violet was speaking, it was a controlled switch to the generator. When it went out again, the Legislature had switched back to WAPA. The timing was off, Mr. Hedrington said, concurring that the voltage adjustment could have waited until a break, or even after the hearing.

In Friday's release, Mr. Francis gave an explanation similar to Mr. Hedrington's. "An internal investigation into Tuesday's incident indicated that the power disruption was caused when Legislature employees received assistance from WAPA crews to address an ongoing low voltage issue at the Capitol Building. While the employees were proactive in their efforts to correct this problem, these actions occurred without proper notification to the Legislature's leadership and resulted in the outages that briefly interrupted the Committee of the Whole," the Senate president said.

Mr. Francis took full ownership of the mishap, which he said was not intended to undermine the hearing or negatively affect the public's perception of the authority.

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