

The Virgin Islands Consortium

After Scolding WAPA Executives, Senators Tour Power Plants On St. Thomas And St. Croix

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WAPA executives were the recipients of an all-day scolding by members of the 33rd Legislature earlier this month. Senators blasted the officials for the the unreliability of the authority, its sky-high utility rate and the seeming penchant to raise rates even higher whenever it finds itself in a financial bind. The executives were also blasted for mismanagement and for not providing requested information, among other things.

Earlier this week, however, senators got a firsthand look at improvements made at both of WAPA's power plants. "We extended an invitation for the lawmakers to get a firsthand look at the new, more efficient, and propane-fired Wartsila and Aggreko generators," said WAPA CEO Lawrence Kupfer according to a release the authority issued late

Friday. He noted that the opportunity to tour the facilities and interact with staff was timely following the extensive testimony WAPA provided the senate recently on all aspects of the utility's operations.

At the plants, senators got an up-close look at the power generating units, control rooms, the Vitol LPG Facilities, the advanced technology in use at the electrical substations as well as the Seven Seas Seawater Reverse Osmosis water production plants, WAPA said.

On St. Thomas, Plant Superintendent John Woodson III briefed senators on what has been determined to be the root cause of recent service interruptions in the St. Thomas - St. John district. Mr. Woodson pointed to pressure regulating valves that govern the fuel flow to two of WAPA's leased generators.

"Our analysis showed that the valves were not providing the volume of fuel supply needed when plant instability occurred resulting in their tripping off-line. With the replacement of the valves, we have seen greater reliability from the two generating units, and, in general, more stable performance," Mr. Woodson said.

Earlier this year, Governor Albert Bryan and members of his executive staff, got a similar tour of the St. Thomas power plant, WAPA said.

"We are hopeful that the firsthand look at this aspect of our operations coupled with the information provided at the October 1 hearing will provide some insight to the Legislature as we work together with the senators, governor, and other elected officials to ensure a brighter future for WAPA," said Mr. Kupfer.

The tours of the power plants with members of the Legislature took place on Monday, October 7 on St. Croix, and Friday, October 11 on St. Thomas.

"The opportunity to provide lawmakers a first-hand look at WAPA's operations capped the annual observance of Public Power week which focused on helping customers and stakeholders understand how they can better engage with their community owned utility," Mr. Kupfer concluded.