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Sarauw Blasts Governor Bryan For 'Coddling' WAPA, 'Refusing to Hold Them Accountable'

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Senator Janelle Sarauw By. VI LEGISLATURE

Senator Janelle Sarauw, chair of the Committee on Rules and Judiciary returned fire to Governor Albert Bryan late Wednesday, after the governor vetoed two bills directly related to WAPA, one that sought to bring oversight to the authority and another making changes to the utility's board structure. A third measure sought to make changes to the Public Services Commission board in an effort to bring more accountability. But Mr. Bryan vetoed them all, citing the Revised Organic Act and Separation of Powers Doctrine to argue that the senators' action was an overreach.

"To allow this intrusion by the Legislature into the executive branch of Government would open the door to the gradual erosion of the restraints engendered by the doctrine of Separation of

Powers," Mr. Bryan levied in his transmittal letter to the Senate. "There would be no logical termination point to the Legislature's power to give advice and consent. This was not the intention of the framers of the Constitution nor Congress in promulgating the Revised Organic Act."

Ms. Sarauw, a primary sponsor of the WAPA oversight bill, blasted the governor. "Every attempt made to address WAPA has been intercepted by Governor Bryan," she told the Consortium late Wednesday. "He coddles the utility company and refuses to hold them accountable."

On Mr. Bryan's veto message, she said, "The governor's veto message is interesting to say the least. WAPA is not an instrumentality of the executive branch. WAPA's executive director and its operations are matters of the governing board. The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority was created by this body. Our right to oversight and accountability cannot be viewed as usurping the power of the executive branch. His claims are unfounded."

She concluded, "As primary bill sponsor, I'm disappointed."

Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, also a primary sponsor on the measure, said, "This measure was crafted well over a year ago in response to WAPA's deeply rooted issues. WAPA has proven to be a nightmare to many residents and it would be irresponsible for this Legislative body to stand idle. The Senate has oversight responsibilities, and it is our sworn duty to ease the burden of residents—with WAPA being a primary and prevalent issue."

And Senator Kenny Gittens also expressed disappointment, stating, "I am very disappointed about these vetoes, given that this proposed legislation represented a concerted effort to enforce real and much needed change at WAPA and I have begun discussions with my colleagues as to how we can best proceed under the circumstances."

Mr. Bryan also vetoed Bill No. 33- 0343, an Act to amend Title 19 of the Virgin Islands Code establishing minimum criteria for members of the Virgin Islands Government and Health Facilities Corporation Board, decreasing the number of its members, and increasing the stipend of its board members. The governor argued the same separation of powers doctrine as reason for his action.