

The Virgin Islands Consortium

34th Legislature Blasts Bryan For Failing to Rein in WAPA, Calls on Governor to Take Immediate Action Following 12-Hour Blackout in St. Thomas-St. John District

WAPA / **Published On June 18, 2021 03:41 PM /**

Ernice Gilbert **June 18, 2021**



The [12-hour power outage](#) in the St. Thomas-St. John District that affected residents and commerce activity Thursday and Friday prompted the 34th Legislature to apply pressure to Governor Albert Bryan, who the Senate contends has failed to rein in the authority and has blocked several measures aimed bringing about change.

In a blunt release issued Friday afternoon, the leadership of the Legislature said it was "once again calling on Mr. Bryan "to take immediate action on addressing the issues that

exist at the V.I. Water and Power Authority."

"The situation at the Water and Power Authority continues to create anxiety and economic uncertainty for the people of the territory," stated the release. "The territory has continued to experience blackouts absent of bad weather or other natural disasters. These last few blackouts are clear indicators that the situation is not improving, but rather, is deteriorating."

WAPA at 11:35 p.m. Thursday experienced a district-wide blackout. According to WAPA communications head Jean P. Greaux, Unit 23 failed at 11:35 p.m. and caused all other units to trip, resulting in the blackout. Personnel have been attempting for hours to get the units back up but have not been able to.

Mr. Greaux told the Consortium Friday morning he did not want to provide a projection relative to when power would be restored in the district. "It will all be dependent on how soon we can get the generators up. We need at least two generators running to start to make a dent in restoration," he said, explaining that while one unit is enough to start restoring power, two being online would "give you an opportunity to restore pretty much everything."

At about 12:02 p.m. Friday, WAPA said power was restored to the entire St. Thomas-St. John District, including Water Island and Hassle Island.

Four days earlier, the St. Thomas-St. John District experienced a [similar district-wide outage](#) that lasted five hours.

The Senate release says the Legislature has attempted to address the issues with WAPA through legislation aimed at creating accountability and efficiency within the authority. Those measures have been vetoed by the governor. "I joined this institution in the 33rd Legislature and there have been meetings, hearings, and legislation vetted to address the issues at the authority," stated Ms. Frett-Gregory. "Our attempts to address the matter legislatively were vetoed at the end of the 33rd. Those measures were reintroduced in the 34th and the governor, in his wisdom, vetoed the measures."

The Legislature further stated that while Mr. Bryan continues to use his veto pen, "there has been no interest from the chief executive in having a discussion with the institution on what his plans are in addressing WAPA. Those plans cannot just be what we are receiving in federal funds as a result of the hurricanes of 2017. Communication is essential, and it is lacking."

Senator Novelle Francis, vice president of the 34th Legislature, said, "My colleagues and I agree that making substantive improvements to WAPA will take collective, decisive action. This issue won't be solved overnight, but through intentional movement towards a strong utility."

The Senate leadership chided Mr. Bryan for vetoing bills aimed at holding the authority accountable, including a measure that called for [a turnaround company to assess the authority](#) and provide recommendations on how to reduce the cost of power.

"From the beginning of 2021, there has been an exodus of leadership from the authority," the Legislature said. "To date, we have not seen any serious movement or action taken

by the current governing board of the V.I. Water and Power to replace leadership. The Legislature through Bill No. 34-0021, which was subsequently vetoed, would have provided the mechanism to provide support to the operations of the utility. Further it allowed for what is obviously necessary, oversight and assessment. The operations of the authority's generation, transmission and distribution system have to be mapped and planned out properly, which requires personnel as outlined in a prior report."

Ms. Frett-Gregory added, "Tough decisions will have to be made. We cannot continue on this trajectory of uncertainty and there are many of us that simply cannot afford a generator, and should not be made to suffer in darkness."

In his veto message to the Senate [in May](#), Mr. Bryan said, "...the Legislature has, again, intruded into the supervisory and decision-making powers of the Executive Branch...". In response, the Legislature on Friday demanded "that the governor take his supervisory and decision-making powers and use them to place leadership into the authority and to ensure that the people of the Virgin Islands are not sitting in darkness."

"We are all elected to make decisions on behalf of the people, that includes tough decisions, such as the decisions that have to be made with WAPA and GERS, not just palatable decisions," Ms. Frett-Gregory concluded.