

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Loan Program With No Downpayment Seeks to Give 1,000 Residents Per Year Energy Independence, Bryan Says

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Governor Albert Bryan during his State of the Territory Address Monday night — the final before he faces reelection — announced a plan whose aim is to provide small residential WAPA customers with energy independence through the installation of solar panels at their homes. The program targets 1,000 WAPA customers per year, and these customers will still be connected to WAPA for standby power.

The governor described the initiative as a collaboration with residents to increase renewable energy use, and he has instructed the director of the Energy Office, Kyle

Fleming, to establish a low-interest loan program to fund the installation of solar energy for those small WAPA customers.

"We are seeking to develop a revolving loan fund that is large enough to help 1,000 homeowners achieve energy independence annually. This will mean energy independence for thousands of Virgin Islanders," he disclosed. It was not clear which customers would meet the "small residential" requirement, however more details are expected to be released.

"The repayment of the loans will be conveniently done through the customer's WAPA bill with no money down, as was successfully done before with solar water heater installations. We are designing this program in a manner that is harmless to WAPA and beneficial to customers," he said while describing how the solar installation will contribute to an increasing power supply.

"These solar installations will remain grid-connected and will have WAPA as a standby source of power...The increased production of solar energy will benefit all WAPA's customers," he said.

The governor said the interest accrued on the loans will be retained by WAPA and used to fund more loans. "This is the future of the utility industry, and that future is calling now," he stressed.

Mr. Bryan elaborated on what he described as a transformation that must take place at WAPA if it is to survive. "If WAPA is to survive and properly serve this community, it must transform itself into a renewable energy company and focus more on the distribution of energy than it does on producing power itself," the governor said.

"Increasing the amount of power produced by renewable energy provides a hedge against increasing fossil fuel prices. The rebuilding of the solar farm in Estate Donoe is 70 percent complete and should be back online this spring," he said as he praised the rebuilding measures.

"This is a great start, but WAPA also needs to give greater priority to the development of the FEMA-funded 28-megawatt St. Croix Microgrid Project and the 10-megawatt wind farm at Bovoni. We are ensuring that WAPA is making this transformation towards greater dependence on renewable energy," said the governor as he announced the low-interest loan program for residential customers of WAPA.

He said where WAPA has failed to make adequate progress thus far is on the bigger challenge of providing power at a reasonable cost. However, the governor said positive change is on the horizon.

"Through countless conversations with WAPA and consultation with other advisers, it is clear to me that WAPA has three urgent priorities: expedite the installation of [the recently delivered Wartsila generators](#) that will improve power plant efficiency; immediately refinance the debt owed to VITOL for the construction of the propane terminals; and fast-track the renewable energy projects in the pipeline," he said.

The governor also announced that in 2021 his administration completed two major transportation projects that not only improved traffic flow in Charlotte Amalie but

"provided a much-needed aesthetic upgrade to our waterfront and downtown areas," he announced.

"After 13 years of frustration and inconvenience, the Main Street Revitalization Project was finally concluded. The cobblestone road and decorative streetlights are a welcome refresh of the Main Street experience," he said

"Likewise, after 30 years, the longstanding effort to expand Veteran's Drive to a 4-lane highway has moved one step closer to fruition with the completion of Phase 1 of the Veterans Drive Improvement Project. The improvements not only add safety and utility to the highway but also add beauty to the world-class views of the waterfront," he said.

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