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Bryan Announces Plan to Make St. Croix 100 Percent Solar-Powered in Months, Saying Rising Cost of Fuel Threatens Economy

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In what would amount to one of the boldest moves in USVI government history with far-reaching impacts affecting almost every facet of life, Governor Albert Bryan on Monday announced that he plans on making St. Croix 100 percent solar-powered in a number of months by partnering with a major energy firm that could build and maintain a solar plant powerful enough to easily energize the 84-square mile island.

"We want to put St. Croix 100 percent solar and put as much solar as we can in as quickly as possible. If we have one island that's burning the least amount of fuel possible that's a huge solution for us," the governor said.

If accomplished, the result would be drastically lower utility bills on the Big Island, as St. Croix is called, and among the byproducts of this reality would be a ricocheting of price reductions across industries and sectors as firms small and big save money on utilities. It would also mean more disposable income for Virgin Islanders who pay hundreds of dollars monthly to WAPA, hence stirring economic growth.

Mr. Bryan sees the current high price of oil caused by Russian's war in Ukraine and U.S. inflation, as portending a catastrophic situation identical to the 2008 V.I. Water and Power Authority crisis. At the time, crude oil had risen above \$146 a barrel and WAPA was completely reliant on fossil fuel. Therefore, as the price surged, so too did utility costs in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"Getting something done and getting it down quickly, that's the kind of situation we're in," the governor said Monday. "I told my people think about it as we need to get the whole island energized in 90 days... That's the kind of urgency we're under here because we cannot afford for the light bills to go where they were in 2008, 2009. It crippled our economy, crippled our small businesses — we have to figure this out and we have to do it quickly."

The cost of fuel, already up 45 percent for the year, continues to fluctuate based on developments in Ukraine. On Monday morning, the price of Brent Crude, which is the global benchmark, fell by \$4 a barrel to \$108.55 following news that Russia was willing to have substantive discussions about its war in Ukraine. If those talks fail and the situation on the ground escalates, the price of oil could surge further. If the talks go well, the price could tumble. Last week the price of oil [closed above \\$130 a barrel](#).

In order to accomplish his goal, Mr. Bryan said swift action is needed, and this might come by means of an energy state of emergency declaration to push aside regulatory hurdles and other government red tape. "The way we're looking at this is the same way we looked at the whole grid being out after the [2017 storms]. Like this is an emergency situation so normal timelines don't apply. I've given serious consideration to declaring an energy emergency so that we could fast-track any bidding process, fast-track any permitting process and get somebody in here and get it up as quickly as possible," Mr. Bryan said when queried by the Consortium for a timeline.

The governor said he has tasked the V.I. Energy Office and WAPA officials to lead the charge in examining potential opportunities and routes for Mr. Bryan's vision. The governor mentioned Siemens Energy, for example, as a firm with the wherewithal to deliver the desired outcome. Siemens Energy provides power generation, power transmission, renewable energy, industrial applications, services and storage solutions, according to a description on the firm's [website](#).

"We've been trying to do it with our own resources; one thing is to go immediately out to RFP [request for proposal] and look for a big manufacturer like Siemens [Energy] or one of the other big ones to come in and build the whole thing for us and then sell us back the power," said the governor. "That would save us tons of money perpetually if we do that."

Mr. Bryan said the plan would include a negotiated buyout "after a certain number of years so we could eventually own the solar facility."

Another part of addressing the increases in utility costs is the "fast-tracking of the batteries at all our solar facilities," the governor stated.

As for why St. Croix is being prioritized, Mr. Bryan said, "The reason why we're looking at St. Croix is because it's the easiest in terms of topography. We already had a 25 megabit plant that we were looking to install here, so it's just fast-tracking everything."

Mr. Bryan spoke of traveling to Washington for discussions with U.S. Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm. He also said he would meet with the V.I. Legislature in the spirit of collaboration. "There are things we can do without them but we prefer a collaborative approach to this," he said.

At the end of his press briefing, the governor sought to reassure Virgin Islanders. "Don't panic yet, we have this under control," he said, "We got some options and some resources.... As we go into summer people will be using more energy, but rest assured we are working to get you there and we're going to figure this out."

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