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WAPA Calls Emergency Meeting to Discuss Fuel Supply Issues Impacting Authority

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Aerial shot of the V.I. Water and Power Authority Richmond Plant. **By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM**

The V.I. Water and Power Authority will host an emergency meeting Friday morning to discuss what the authority described as "fuel supply issues" impacting its operations.

"The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority will hold an emergency board meeting at 8 a.m. Friday, March 18, 2022. The purpose of the emergency board meeting is to discuss fuel supply issues affecting the agency," WAPA said Thursday night.

Governor Albert Bryan recently told the Consortium that his administration was in the process of looking for ways to help residents offset what he said would be shock increases in their utility bills because of the rising cost of fuel. On Thursday, Brent crude, the global benchmark, closed at $106.64 a barrel, rising 8.8 percent after falling earlier in the week.

Crude prices jumped Thursday on continued supply concerns due to sanctions on Russia. It was not clear what was causing WAPA to experience fuel supply issues, however it could be connected to funding or supply chain bottlenecks exacerbated by the war in Ukraine as Russia is one of the largest oil exporters in the world. Still, it could be something else entirely, and Consortium journalists will be in the meeting.

On Monday, Mr. Bryan announced plans for what would amount to one of the boldest moves in USVI government history with far-reaching impacts affecting almost every facet of life. "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, which Mr. Bryan hopes will be done "in months," 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."