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As Fuel Costs Surge, Bryan Says Declaration of Energy State of Emergency to Fast-Track Renewable Push Still on Table

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Linda Straker **June 14, 2022**

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Price of gas at a gas station in Sunny Isle, St. Croix as of Tues. June 14, 2022. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan has said that a state of emergency declaration for the V.I. Water and Power Authority is not off the table, as the cost of fuel continues to surge globally — forcing the local government to buttress the utility [to the tune of \\$4 million a month since March](#).

The governor first suggested that a state of emergency declaration for WAPA was on the table in March, when he [announced plans](#) to move the territory's power grid from fossil fuel to renewable energy.

"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 in March.

On Monday, the governor said he would wait until the current, wider state of emergency declaration tied to the Covid-19 pandemic [ends in June](#) before making a decision. "[An energy state of emergency declaration] doesn't give me any more power than I have until the [current] state or emergency is done," Mr. Bryan told the Consortium. Asked whether it would happen, the governor said, "Still contemplating it."

The price of Brent Crude, which is the global benchmark, closed at \$123.17 Monday, and the cost for gas in the U.S. is now averaging \$5 per gallon of unleaded regular. On St. Croix, the price for a gallon of unleaded regular is \$5.99 at many gas stations, while St. Thomas has been averaging \$6 for a few months.

With consumers feeling pressure from all corners as a result sky-high inflation not seen since 1981, and gas prices continuing to eat at their finances, Governor Bryan sees an increase in utility bills as a non-starter and has vowed to continue subsidizing WAPA. He said WAPA is paying 62 cents per kilowatt hour while only charging residents 41 cents. "That's not by magic, we are subsidizing rates. I made a commitment and I'm sticking to it for now," Mr. Bryan said recently.

Asked about WAPA's plans once the inevitable occurs and the government subsidy ends, the governor said, "We have some efficiency plans that will ultimately save some money and lower energy costs, including solar."