

Legislature of the Virgin Islands

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The Honorable
Angel Bolques, Jr.
Senator-At-Large
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

CHAIRMAN
Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, & Parks

VICE-CHAIRMAN
Committee on Economic Development & Agriculture

MEMBER
Committee on Rules & Judiciary
Committee on Homeland Security, Justice & Public Safety
Committee on Housing, Transportation, & Telecommunication
Subcommittee on Energy & Infrastructure Development



MEDIA PRESS RELEASE

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Senator-At-Large Angel Bolques Jr. Expresses Deep Concern Over Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority's Capacity and Reliability

U.S. Virgin Islands — Senator Angel Bolques Jr. today expressed profound disappointment and concern regarding the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority's (WAPA) continued inability to provide reliable electricity and water services to the residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands. This follows a major failure on the underground transmission line that carries power from St. Thomas, leaving all 2,600 WAPA customers on St. John without electricity for extended periods.

"Reliable electricity and water are not luxuries; they are essential services that our residents depend on daily," said Senator Bolques. "The recent outages have placed an enormous burden on the people of St. John, who already face unique challenges due to the lack of comprehensive infrastructure compared to St. Thomas and St. Croix. This situation is especially dangerous for our elderly and disabled residents, working families, and our business sector, including the public sector."

During a WAPA board meeting, CEO Andrew Smith admitted, "We can never get to a zero outage scenario," highlighting the severe limitations of the current infrastructure. Board members discussed numerous ongoing issues, including disputes over new generators and delayed infrastructure buyouts, exacerbating the power reliability crisis.

"The current state of WAPA's infrastructure and management is unacceptable," stated Senator Bolques. "St. John's residents are particularly vulnerable due to their reliance on imported resources for everything,



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making the need for reliable power even more critical. The outages have already caused significant disruptions, including business closures and impacts on essential services like the VI Waste Management Authority and the Cyril E. King Airport on St. Thomas."

Senator Bolques emphasized the dire consequences of these power failures: "Imagine the hardship for families trying to care for their newborn and elderly members or for businesses striving to stay afloat without consistent electricity. This is not just an inconvenience; it is a public safety issue."

WAPA's ongoing financial and operational struggles were laid bare, with board members citing neglected maintenance, budget constraints, and the lack of backup generators. "We desperately need to do major maintenance on our generators," Smith noted, while also admitting that cash flow issues hinder necessary repairs and upgrades.

Senator Bolques called for immediate action and greater transparency from WAPA: "We need decisive action to address these systemic failures. It's time for WAPA to prioritize the well-being of our residents and ensure that we have the capacity and redundancy necessary to prevent such widespread outages in the future."

Additionally, Senator Bolques urged WAPA to invest in green energy options such as solar, wind, or hydro to augment the grid. "By investing in renewable energy sources, WAPA can enhance grid reliability and drive down costs. Embracing green energy is not just a smart economic move; it's essential for creating a sustainable future for the Virgin Islands," he said.

In light of these challenges, Senator Bolques urged the government to provide more substantial support and for WAPA to explore all avenues, including grants, to fund critical maintenance and upgrades. "Our community cannot afford to continue living in uncertainty. The residents of the Virgin Islands deserve better."

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****Also See Senator Bolques Media Press Release on April 6, 2024 - Senator-At-Large Angel Bolques Jr. Explores Eaton Arcibo Micro Grid; Networking and Paving the Way for Clean Energy Solutions in the Virgin Islands***