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FEMA Approves Replacement of Two Power Generation Units on St. Thomas

US VIRGIN ISLANDS – Governor Albert Bryan Jr. was joined for a major announcement Wednesday at Government House on St. Croix by VI Office of Disaster Recovery Director (ODR) Adrienne L. Williams-Octalien, WAPA Board Chair Kyle Fleming and WAPA Chief Administrative Officer Don Gregoire.

In the press conference, Governor Bryan announced that FEMA will be replacing the entire Richmond Power Plant on St. Croix and several units on St. Thomas. He expressed his congratulations to the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (“WAPA” or “Authority”), specifically highlighting Ashley Bryan, Chief Operating Officer-Electric, and ODR for their dedicated efforts. Governor Bryan emphasized that this program not only addresses current challenges but also paves the way for a more resilient and reliable power infrastructure.

“We are building a legacy with WAPA. It’ll take all of us for this to happen,” Governor Bryan stated. He also highlighted the necessity of trust between the government and the people, assuring that this initiative marks a critical step towards resolving longstanding issues with WAPA.

“We exist to serve the people. This is not just about improving our infrastructure; it’s about building a legacy of reliability and trust,” he said. “We are all in this together, and our commitment to transparency and accountability is firm.”

Kyle Fleming, Chairman of WAPA and Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Energy Office, echoed the sentiments of cooperation and urgency. “This is a two-fold win,” Chairman Fleming asserted. He elaborated on the efforts to address a wide spectrum of

issues, noting that the Board is actively providing guidance and resources on immediate corrections. “This grant allows us to increase efficient generation and secure federal funds, enabling us to reallocate available funds to other priority projects.”

As a result of the Bipartisan Budget Act passed in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma & Maria, the ODR and its consultants, in cooperation with WAPA, requested in December 2022 that FEMA perform a prudent replacement analysis of units 17 and 20 at the Richmond Power Plant in St. Croix and units 14,15 and 23 at the Randolph Harley Power Plant on St. Thomas. The request was a direct result of repetitive power outages plaguing the territory after the 2017 storms. The territory ascertained that the damages caused by the storms coupled with the aging of these units, which have already surpassed their useful life at over 30 years for most, with one unit on St. Thomas being over 50 years old, should be replaced, not repaired.

At the request of FEMA, the US Department of Energy (DOE) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the units and generating systems at both plants, playing a crucial role in the decision-making process.

It was determined that repairing the generation systems to pre-storm industry standards would require replacing several key components to ensure communication and coordination across the Richmond facility. DOE’s findings established that replacing the entire plant rather than a few units was a more prudent and cost-effective solution to ensuring long-term stability and resilience on St. Croix.

At the Randolph Harley Power Plant on St. Thomas, FEMA approved, based on DOE analysis, the replacement of Units 14 and 15. Additionally, these approvals will provide the necessary interconnections to allow for more renewable energy, including solar and wind.

ODR Director Adrienne L. Williams-Octalien, noted the importance of working closely with WAPA and federal partners to ensure a smooth process, “We are creating resilience for the power supply going forward,” she said. “We thank the DOE for their technical

support and FEMA for this opportunity to build back better,” Director Williams-Octalien said.

The next step is to agree on a cost with FEMA, which is currently estimated at \$400-\$600 million for the Richmond Power Plant alone. Once the projects are obligated, the Authority will begin soliciting vendors to complete the approved scopes.

The Authority acknowledges the challenges faced by customers over the past few weeks and is committed to resolving these issues promptly. Immediate solutions are being implemented for residents with medical needs in St. John, and inquiries can be addressed to St. John Administrator Shikima Jones-Sprauve at (340)474-5762, as noted during the press conference.

Governor Bryan underscored the importance of this initiative, stating, “We need to address these things to get WAPA out of these rough waters.” He assured that under the State of Emergency, the WAPA Governing Board and the Governor’s Office are aligned. “This grant marks a significant milestone toward power stability in the territory, allowing us to reconcile immediate solutions and long-term improvements simultaneously.”

The Authority and the Bryan-Roach Administration remain dedicated to enhancing services and ensuring a resilient power future for the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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CDBG-DR Action Plan

(<https://www.vihfa.gov/sites/default/files/USVI%20Disaster%20Recovery%20Action%20Plan%203.1.19.pdf>)

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CDBG-DR 2017 Events (<https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg-dr/cdbg-dr-laws-regulations-and-federal-register-notices/>)

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