



Open Letter to the Governor and the members of the 28th Legislature

It is in the most humble of spirit and kinship that this correspondence is submitted. With the decision to navigate through the muddy waters of the never ending financial crises, often we disregard the most basic of necessities in our community.

I recently received the following announcement from a very good friend of mine. **He starts out by saying “breaking news; my last day in business will be Monday, April 26, 2010. I must close my business due to the hard economic situation and also I will lay off four people.”** Receiving this message via text broke my heart!

How can an entrepreneur with such energy and enthusiasm for life, born and raised in our territory, with such resolve, quit and give up? Why is this so important? This is the beginning of the end for many small businesses in the V.I. Personally; I don't believe many of our elected officials were very responsive to the pain and suffering of the people over the past two years.

Summer of 2008 was when small businesses, senior citizens and the working class had to pay utility bills that rivaled their rent! Many of our senior citizens had to decide between medicine, food and light. Senior citizens went without power as if they were living here 100 years ago. They decided that food and medicine had to win that personal quest. Now, how can a society subsist when our utilities take precedent over medicine, food or rent? Recently, I spoke to another business owner who said, “He will close his business permanently if the LEAC is increased again.”

How many other business owners echo the same pain silently? During the summer of 2008 the cost of oil rose as high as \$147 per barrel and it contributed to 54 cents per kilowatt. And here we are surrounded by potential wave, wind and solar power!

I am pleading with our present elected officials to put aside your insignificant differences, relate to the pain of the people, and tackle our prolonged energy crises NOW!

According to the Executive Dir of WAPA Hugo Hodge Jr. our government, which owns WAPA, owes WAPA, \$14 million dollars as of April 28, 2010 which is what he reported at the Public Services Commission. In other words, we owe ourselves: go figure! If we are already behind this large amount of money when the price of oil per barrel is hovering at \$79 per; what will happen if the price of oil hits \$100 per barrel which is neither impossible nor unlikely.

We're demanding that our elected officials make our prolonged energy crises a top priority. The ramifications of not being proactive out-weigh the anguish that will transpire if you refuse to address this matter now!

WAPA is likely to return to the PSC summer 2010 and seek another LEAC increase when the price of oil is expected to hit the \$90 per barrel. As long as the government fails to take care of their financial responsibilities WAPA continues to be unable to satisfactorily preserve their equipment and our senior citizens, small businesses and the working class of our community have to bare the brunt of the outrageous utility costs.

With the approval of the recent loan in the amount of 250 million dollars, May 2010, this writer would advocate for a portion be distributed to WAPA immediately to help cover the cost of the next shipment of fuel which would reduce the amount that the rate payer would be billed by HOVENSA through WAPA, which WAPA would be able to pass those cost saving measures to the Senior Citizens, small businesses, and the working men and women of our territory.

My dear friend, who had to close his business after many years in service, tried on several occasions to reach out to the elected body of our territory only to have his cry fall on deaf ears and campaign promises that are rarely kept. He and the other four employees are now probably at the unemployment office filling out the appropriate documentation so they can join in with the millions of Americans who receive assistance to maintain there livelihood.

I say to the elected officials, even if you are not re-elected, don't you want your name etched in the mind of your neighbors, family, and most of all your children as a warrior who fought for the least of thee or you don't mind being compared to the likes of common street hustlers or to the cooperate thugs of Wall Street? You decide the fate of your family's name.

As a community activist, I must keep this matter front and center of the territory's priorities and I encourage everyone to join me.

Clarence Payne
St. Thomas resident

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