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January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Honorable Diane T. Capehart, Committee of Rules and Judiciary, Chair  
Thirty-Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands  
Capitol Building  
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00802

Subject:

Testimony for the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority Board of Directors  
Nominations

Opening:

Good morning Senator Capehart, Chair of the Rules and Judiciary Committee of the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the Virgin Islands, committee members that compose this body and welcomed guests. My name is Maurice Kinyali Muia, and I am humbled to be present with you this morning for my nomination hearing for appointment to the Board of Directors of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority.

Testimony:

Today, as I present myself for nomination to this Committee and the nomination in front of you, please understand that I am here because of WAPA. Not WAPA in 2024, but WAPA in the mid – late 80's. You see, I clearly remember the early mornings on Frenchman Hill when my grandparents and I experienced brownouts and blackouts due to the rationing of power and potable water. I can clearly see a 10-year-old Maurice going down to the cistern with his grandmother fetch buckets of water to bathe in the morning as he got ready for school at Kirwan A. Terrace Elementary School.

WAPA is the sole reason that I became an electrical engineer, more specifically, a power systems engineer. Consequently, my educational choices, career opportunities, and areas of public and personal service has prepared me for today.

On Monday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, I tuned into the State of Territory, which was delivered by the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. in chambers at the Legislature of the Virgin Islands. I have to say, the future of the U.S. Virgin Islands looks extremely bright and promising. The GDP of the Virgin Islands was \$4B in 2021, with 2.3% growth in '23, \$1.1B in revenue in FY22 and \$1B of funding from FEMA for water pipe replacements in the St. Thomas and St. John district. The Government of the Virgin Islands has subsidized electrical rates to the tune of \$100M for residents' territory wide. Thank goodness the (4) Wartsila units will be in-service soon, bringing lower rates to customers of VIWAPA for decades to come.

All of this is due to the People of the Virgin Islands demanding action from its leaders, which includes you in this Committee and the entire legislative body. I would like to say from my family and I to this body, thank you for your unwavering commitment and service to our islands and our people. This is a selfless job and many times there is not a

perfect solution, but you deliver the best outcome for the common good and that is all that the public asks of you.

Unfortunately, the work of transforming the Virgin Islands to a place of promise is incomplete. Inflation in the territory is in a state of runaway. The price of food is placing those most vulnerable such as young children and our senior citizens and their health in jeopardy. And the discolored potable water from the beyond their useful life cast iron water mains have a new maintenance program coming online, but I could only imagine the scare for residents when that water comes out of the pipe. So much of these things eat away at our economic success. This is rooted in our high electricity and potable water rates. The residential rate for the first 250kWh of electricity is \$48c/kWh, this is three times the national average. To be direct, this continued challenge is fiscally and environmentally unsustainable for people and the planet's ecosystems.

You may be asking in your head as I speak, what do you propose, Maurice? How will your confirmation benefit the People of the Virgin Islands and its visitors? My response is why not a son of the Virgin Islands. Why not one who has shown his commitment throughout his life and has cultivated the industry and professional relationships that are exactly what is needed at this critical juncture. We have a similar vision, one in which the progress and performance of VIWAPA is sustained over time and there during hard times when people feel it the most.

The VIWAPA must work tirelessly to achieve a residential rate between \$12-14c/kWh. Achieving and maintaining this challenging milestone will require an entrepreneurial mindset. New rate classes and programs for the diverse demographic of small and large customers that the Authority serves will need to be developed collaboratively. This can be accomplished through an advanced deployment of hardened energy storage devices in front and behind the meter to adjust to daily feeder load demand fluctuations that is extremely challenging for renewable energy power generation.

These programs can be partially paid for by reducing O&M through the increase in predictive maintenance, the renegotiation of more flexible and long-term contracting vehicles for labor, equipment, and materials procured in and out of the territory. We have an opportunity to for a new class of electricians, laborers, engineers, finance, vendors, and training of the next generation of the Virgin Islands labor force – today.

The Virgin Islands should not only be best in – class in tourism, but we should also be best in class in zero – emissions power generation, transmission, and distribution, resilient to climate change, and excellent in communications and customer service.

To put the question to rest, when I away from the U.S. Virgin Islands and deep in power systems engineering activities, I am fighting for you back home. When I am meeting with electrical equipment manufacturers and representatives, I am fighting for you. When I am building strategies with customers and clients, I am fighting for you. My life's work is focused learning abroad and bringing the best of power systems engineering and water delivery systems and practices back to the U.S. Virgin Islands to ensure that we are the best in the Caribbean region and the United States of America for the benefit of the People of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

This is my vision for a U.S. Virgin Islands that our ancestors will be proud of and one that our children will thank us for leaving to them, as they are the future leaders of our beautiful Virgin Islands.

Thank you for your time. I will take any questions that you may have for me.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MKM' with a flourish at the end.

Maurice Kinyali Muia