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## Bryan's Chief of Staff, Karl Knight, Voted as WAPA's Next Executive Director

**WAPA board appoints Karl Knight as executive director; Governor Bryan cites extensive experience and need for immediate leadership amid utility's challenges**

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Karl Knight, left, speaks as Governor Bryan listen during a Bryan-Roach transition team meeting back in 2019. By. FILE PHOTO

Information reaching the Consortium is that Karl Knight, chief of staff to Governor Albert Bryan Jr., was approved as the next executive director of the Water and Power Authority. The vote for Mr. Knight was taken during the executive session of Thursday's meeting of WAPA's governing board.

During a press conference earlier this month, Consortium journalists asked Governor Albert Bryan Jr. whether he was [lobbying for the appointment](#) of Mr. Knight to replace Mr. Smith as WAPA's executive director, as reported by the Consortium.?

The governor began his response by saying, "I don't want to lose my chief of staff," before launching into a passionate argument about why he felt Mr. Knight was ideally suited for the job, beginning with the urgency of the appointment. "I am not willing to wait for a search committee to do six months of searching to bring me another person that's not familiar with what we're dealing with," Governor Bryan declared. He touted Mr. Knight's "ability to deal with the legislature, our administration, that transparency and trust that's already established", which he said would "allow for us to make an approach."

He extolled Mr. Knight's academic prowess and detailed his long-term close association with WAPA: from the utility company funding his engineering training to him returning to work with WAPA for years. According to Governor Bryan, Mr. Knight "led the effort to write the strategic plan for WAPA at that time, worked in the plants for a number of years." After leaving WAPA's employ, Mr. Knight returned as a board member "through a lot of our troubled times," Mr. Bryan continued. Those times included the period in which WAPA embarked on the ill-fated propane conversion project with Vitol, which ended up costing Virgin Islanders [over \\$113 million more](#) than the initial \$87 million estimate. With the project still incomplete as of press time, the Vitol misadventure ultimately required a \$145 million bailout [from the federal government](#) in order for WAPA to take ownership of the propane infrastructure.

?Governor Bryan also noted that Mr. Knight has been "intimately involved in solar renewables, generation and everything else," having been appointed director of the V.I. Energy Office during the John De Jongh administration. He was seated on the WAPA board by virtue of holding this position.

The governor expressed the belief that agency executives and members of the boards of local organizations can sometimes begin to feel like "they're not part of the Virgin Islands, like the hospital is something unto itself and Waste Management and the Port Authority." As much as these individuals may have "their fiduciary duty to WAPA or to GERS to to whoever," Governor Bryan insisted, "there's a moral responsibility to the people of the Virgin Islands."

That moral responsibility requires appointing people to boards, and putting people "in power positions" who are "in line with what the current administration is pointing so we don't have any divergence of will and force on our mission," Governor Bryan forcefully stated. "That's the only way we're gonna get it fixed." He concluded what seemed like a pitch for Mr. Knight in much the way he began. "I will not be happy about losing my chief of staff."

However, when confronted with the idea that Mr. Knight's qualifications on paper did not meet the standard set out in the Virgin Islands Code for the WAPA executive director, Mr. Bryan bristled. Title 30 of the Code, Section 104, [outlines the structure](#) of the governing board and requirements for an executive director to whom certain of the powers of the board may be delegated. "The Executive Director, at a minimum, shall possess a combined minimum 10 years of documented experience successfully managing a public or private utility or business activity similar, or greater, in scope and size to the Authority," part d) 1) of that section reads.?

"You know we run a \$1.2 billion business with over \$500 million in projects annually, right?" the governor scoffed when asked by the Consortium about Mr. Knight's documented qualifications. "That didn't escape you, did it?" The Bryan administration has been in office since 2018, far less

than the statutory minimum of a decade in management experience required, however. Despite this, Mr. Bryan insisted “my chief of staff is qualified.” He then intercepted a question directed at then-chair Kyle Fleming, which was whether as chair of WAPA’s governing board, he would ensure that any appointment of an executive director to replace Andrew Smith would be conducted in conformity with the requirements outlined in the Virgin Islands Code. “Mr. Fleming can’t conform to anything else but the law,” Mr. Bryan answered on Mr. Fleming’s behalf. “Yes, we’re going to follow the law.”

Since then, Mr. Bryan has been vehemently advocating for Mr. Knight's appointment by the WAPA board to be CEO of the authority.

The Consortium has been informed by sources with knowledge of the matter outside the WAPA governing board, that the vote to appoint Mr. Knight as WAPA’s next executive director was three in favor, and two board members against. He was chosen over Lionel Selwood, who also serves as a WAPA board member and has the requisite qualifications for the position.

According to the report from executive session read by Board member Selwood, one of the two personnel matters voted on was unanimous. In the other, Directors Juanita Young, Kyle Fleming, and Cheryl Boynes-Jackson voted in favor, while Directors Hubert Turnbull and Maurice Muia voted against.