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Bryan Names Craig Benjamin as Executive Director for School Construction and Maintenance

With a strong background in school construction, Benjamin steps into a pivotal role to manage critical education infrastructure projects

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Craig Benjamin, executive director of the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance. By. VIC

Craig Benjamin, a native Virgin Islander who has built a “distinguished career in school construction,” was announced on Monday as the executive director for the newly formed Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance after a “very painstaking search.” The announcement was made by Governor Albert Bryan Jr. during the weekly Government House press briefing.

The name of the new executive director remained a secret for weeks, with [educational officials](#) deciding to leave the announcement to Government House.

During a June meeting of the Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure, and Planning, Education Commissioner Dionne Well-Hedrington told lawmakers that Mr. Benjamin - unnamed at the time - would begin leading the Bureau on June 17th. She also revealed that he had no prior experience working within the territory.

Despite his apparent inexperience in maneuvering the local work culture and its related challenges, Mr. Benjamin was grateful for the opportunity to serve. His work experience includes a portfolio of projects in the Washington D.C/Virginia/Maryland area, and Mr. Benjamin addressed the public for the first time during Monday's briefing. The new executive director is looking forward to being a "valuable asset and [contributing] in areas that I have the expertise in." Now two weeks into the role, he shared the observation that there is "a lot of work to be done," and assured that his team "will get these schools built."

"We're gonna go the course, get them done, and at the end of the day, the community should be thankful and pleased with what we've produced," promised Mr. Benjamin. He referred to the challenges associated with the timelines of bringing major construction projects online. The new executive director has come on board during what is considered a critical time for school reconstruction and maintenance in the USVI. "We're currently negotiating \$850 million worth of school contracts, and we have at least another \$150 million to \$200 million of school contracts already underway," noted the governor.

"He is a welcomed addition to our cabinet, to our Virgin Islands family. Welcome home," Mr. Bryan declared.

The Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance features a unique organizational framework, split between the Department of Education and the Office of the Governor. Lawmakers [during a June hearing](#) had expressed concerns with this arrangement. "If we continue to politicize these things, this is where you're going to have subordinate individuals telling a commissioner ...I don't work for you, I work directly for the governor...This is going to create some confusion," stated Senator Kenneth Gittens.

According to the law, whose author is Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, the executive director must be "appointed by the Governor," and this person must be either "an architect or engineer licensed in the Virgin Islands; an individual with seven or more years of experience in construction, capital project management, or maintenance management."

Mr. Gittens's sentiments were not shared by the Dept. of Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington, who repeatedly maintained that she looks forward to regular communication with the Bureau's new executive director. Where organizational concerns lie, she reminded lawmakers that it "would not be the first time that we've brought stuff back to this body" if the enabling legislation for the Bureau – Act 8717 – is ultimately found to require amendment.

During Mr. Benjamin's public presentation on Monday, members of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance were questioning the V.I. Department of Education about its plans for school maintenance during the summer. These inquiries will eventually be directed to the Bureau as well. The Committee on Education and Workforce Development is scheduled to meet in August, but it is not yet confirmed if Mr. Benjamin will make his first legislative appearance at that time.

