

No Confidence Motion Against BVI Premier Natalio Wheatley Halted After Procedural Dispute

Premier Wheatley claims the no confidence motion against him was improperly filed, resulting in its removal from the agenda as opposition members accuse his administration of mismanaging public funds and diminishing quality of life in the territory

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Janeke Simon **September 04, 2024**

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BVI Premier Natalio Wheatley

Rising on a point of order, Premier of the British Virgin Islands Natalio Wheatley objected to a motion of no confidence being brought by Opposition members during Tuesday's sitting of the House of Assembly. "The correct procedure was not followed" for bringing the motion, Mr. Wheatley claimed, as the motion was sent to the Speaker of the House instead of the Clerk of

Parliament as prescribed in Standing Order 23.?

The no confidence motion was being brought as a result of Mr. Wheatley's poor performance in government since last April's election, resulting in what the Opposition described as "a rapidly declining quality of life" for BVI residents.

Wheatley's blunders, chief among them a recent \$20 million miscalculation in the territory's public sector wage bill, have weakened the public's trust and confidence in his administration's ability to properly manage the affairs of the territory, Opposition members have argued.

?It appears that the motion was not transmitted to the Leader of Government Business prior to the agenda item being added to the order paper. Leader of the Opposition Ronnie Skelton told Speaker Corine George-Massicote that he believed he was doing the right thing by handing his motion in to the Speaker within the stipulated time frame, while Sixth District Representative Myron Walwyn emphasized the importance of bipartisanship in House matters. He noted that the Opposition had, on several occasions, allowed things that were not technically correct in order not to disrupt the smooth functioning of the House.

However, Deputy Premier Lorna Smith, while thanking Opposition members for their cooperation on matters important to the people of the Virgin Islands, said that the House "lives by these Standing Orders, and that is how we should move forward."

After a lengthy debate by parliamentarians, Opposition members streamed out of the House Chamber, forcing Speaker George-Massicote to summon them back after losing quorum. Following an almost 90-minute recess, the Speaker ruled in favor of Mr. Wheatley's point of order contention, and struck the motion of no confidence from the day's Order Paper.

The Opposition is now free to bring the motion again, once all procedural rules are followed.