

WAPA Faces Scrutiny Over Karl Knight Appointment, Lack of National Search

Senator Milton Potter seeks clarity on why WAPA's board did not conduct a comprehensive search before appointing former chief of staff Karl Knight as executive director

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WAPA's latest CEO Karl Knight. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

During a recent meeting of the Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure, and Planning, Senator Milton Potter wanted to know what led to the selection of Karl Knight as the new head of the V.I. Water and Power Authority.

Mr. Knight, Governor Albert Bryan'S former chief of staff, assumed the position of executive director after a vote by WAPA's governing board to approve his appointment. The position to

replace departing CEO Andrew Smith was not advertised. According to Sen. Potter, he wanted to understand “the thought process of the board, with respect to not doing a more comprehensive national search to try to ascertain the best available candidate for this critical job.”?

Last week, Sen. Potter posed the question to Hubert Turnbull, chairman of WAPA’s governing board, assuring testifiers including Mr. Knight that he was “not throwing any shade whatsoever.” In turn, Mr. Turnbull explained that when Andrew Smith’s tenure ended, “the authority was faced with having the board run the authority day to day, for \$50 to \$175 a day, which didn't make any sense for us.”?

According to Mr. Turnbull, when the board contemplated a suitable replacement, Mr. Knight was one such candidate. “I learned that he started working at the authority when he was 16 years old. I remember him being part of the professional and technical union in the authority. I remember him sitting on the governing board also,” explained Mr. Turnbull. He told lawmakers that Mr. Knight “threw his hat in the ring and this is who we chose.” Speaking on behalf of WAPA’s governing board, Mr. Turnbull explained that “it wasn't a hard choice for the board to choose somebody who was available at that point in time.”

Careful not to discount Mr. Knight’s “background and experiences”, Sen. Potter again contended that “[with] positions of this magnitude...there's an expectation that you're going to be doing an extensive search to identify the best possible person.” He acknowledged that “we may have ended up with Mr. Knight as the best available person,” but told Mr. Turnbull that the line of questioning is “something that I know is on the minds of some of the folks in this community.”

When asked in June about [a Consortium report](#) that Mr. Knight had been selected by the board, Governor Albert Bryan [told the Consortium](#) that he was “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.” 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.” Mr. Bryan testily pushed back against claims that Mr. Knight did not meet the qualifications described under the Virgin Islands Code, and the man once tasked with managing the governor’s affairs took the helm of the embattled Water and Power Authority in late July.?

Karl Knight, who was present at the committee meeting, remained silent as lawmakers questioned his selection.