

BVI Political Turmoil: Wheatley Ousts Smith Ahead of No Confidence Vote

Wheatley removes Smith as Deputy Premier, citing concerns over loyalty and political stability. Fraser steps in as the new Deputy Premier as parliament braces for a crucial no confidence vote. Smith dismisses Wheatley's reasoning as baseless.

Caribbean / **Published On October 24, 2024 05:48 AM /**

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BVI Premier Natalio Wheatley and Lorna Smith, BVI outgoing deputy premier.

A huge shakeup occurred within the Government of the British Virgin Islands this week, as parliamentarians prepare for a vote of no confidence against Premier Natalio Wheatley on Friday.

A statement from Mr. Wheatley on Wednesday morning informed the public that Lorna Smith will no longer serve as Deputy Premier. She had also been stripped of her ministerial portfolios,

the premier indicated. “She did not give me the confidence that she would remain with my administration for the duration of this term,” Mr. Wheatley's statement read. “This left room for uncertainty, and political instability, which we cannot afford at this time.”

Ms. Smith was sworn in as Deputy Premier on April 25, 2023 after defecting from the National Democratic Party to give the Virgin Islands Party the majority they needed to take control of the government.

Following her ouster, Mr. Wheatley announced that Julian Fraser, the lone member of the Progressive United party in the BVI Parliament, would now serve as Deputy Premier. Mr. Fraser will serve as Minister for Environment, Natural Resources, and Climate Change, and bear ministerial responsibility for Labor and Immigration.

According to Wheatley, Mr. Fraser's appointment “is a necessary change to the composition of the Government that provides my administration with political stability and a wealth of knowledge and experience.” He touted the veteran politician's long service, noting that he is “the House of Assembly's most senior member today, having served as a parliamentarian for over 25 years.”

Mr. Fraser, Wheatley said, would prove invaluable in future constitutional negotiations with the United Kingdom, having served as a member of the negotiating team that agreed on the territory's 2007 constitution.

Despite expressing his loss of confidence in Ms. Smith's loyalty, Mr. Wheatley nevertheless thanked her “for her hard work and dedication as Deputy Premier.” Ahead of the upcoming vote of no confidence, he said he hoped that “a positive working relationship” could be maintained with the ousted Smith.

In a press conference on the same day as the reports of her sacking, Ms. Smith called Wheatley's reasoning “baseless.” She urged that he “be honest with the people about his true motives,” and defended her work record as Minister for Financial Services, Labour and Trade.

Friday's anticipated no confidence vote comes after a previous attempt in the beginning of September was scuppered due to a procedural flaw.