

logo not found or type unknown

Debate Over Qualifications Marks PSC Appointment of Jed JohnHope to Oversee Ferry Rates

Commissioners debate the qualifications of Jed JohnHope, a non-attorney consultant, in a heated meeting that concluded with his approval to investigate ferry franchise rates

Board Meetings / **Published On November 08, 2024 06:19 AM /**

Janeka Simon **November 08, 2024**

Image not found or type unknown



Jed Johnhope

At Thursday's meeting of the Public Services Commission, Jed JohnHope was appointed hearing examiner to conduct rate reviews for the ferry franchisees.

Mr. JohnHope, who briefly served on the board of the Water and Power Authority, is now a consultant who focuses on business development and innovation, according to his LinkedIn profile.

Sandra Setorie, PSC executive director, said that agency staff recommended Mr. JohnHope as being best suited for the task after considering their list of previous hearing examiners as well as new respondents to a request for qualifications.

“He certainly meets the qualification for hearing examiner,” said Ms. Setorie, after disclosing that Mr. JohnHope was not an attorney. When asked whether he had any experience with ferry franchises, she said “with utilities, yes, but not specifically ferry franchises.”

PSC Commissioners Raymond Williams and David Hughes spoke in favor of the appointment. “I know the individual and their capacity,” said Mr. Raymond Williams. Mr. Hughes declared that he “strongly supported” Mr. JohnHope, citing his personal and professional knowledge of the person in question.

PSC Chair Pedro Williams was reluctant to lend his support, citing a lack of insight. “I don't know this individual other than seeing his name in public, but all we got was his resume,” he said, perhaps referring to the recommendation package which Ms. Setorie said was distributed to commissioners on Wednesday. “There was nothing that said we compared this individual with these two other persons and three other persons, and here's a matrix as to why we think he will be the best person.”

Agency staff had not responded to his request to have that information sent to him, Pedro Williams said, and thus he was not prepared to vote yes on that recommendation. Ms. Setorie promised to supply commissioners with a list of those who had performed similar work focusing on various other utilities in the past.

A concern about Mr. JohnHope's lack of a law degree was expressed by the representative of the ferry companies, and echoed by Chairman Pedro Williams. “Having somebody who's a member of the bar would certainly be an advantage, not that somebody who's not a lawyer couldn't do it,” he said.

Ms. Setorie quickly pointed out that not all past examiners have had a law degree, citing several examples. “I've served as a hearing examiner,” she declared.

Commissioner Raymond Williams dismissed concerns along those lines as “disingenuous”, reiterating Ms. Setorie's point that previous hearing examiners have not had a legal education. Not being an attorney “doesn't change somebody's professional capacity or ability to evaluate, to discern, to review matters,” said Mr. Williams. Indeed, “a whole lot of these matters are financial and technical more so than legal,” he concluded.

Mr. Hughes expressed some level of impatience with the resistance to the idea of Mr. JohnHope's appointment. “I'm tired of this matter sitting on the agenda without consistent attention from the ferry,” he complained. He warned against commissioners getting too involved in the selection process, and invited Chairman Pedro Williams to pose any lingering questions about Mr. JohnHope's suitability for the appointment to the PSC staff in attendance at the meeting.

The chair declined to take Commissioner Hughes up on his suggestion, and instead entertained a motion from him that would make the appointment official. The motion to appoint Mr. JohnHope as PSC hearing examiner for a ferry rate investigation was approved two votes to one, with Commissioner Nichols-Samms abstaining.