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Bryan Calls for Private Management of WAPA and Hospitals, Says Government Should Step Back

Governor Bryan argues that the Government of the Virgin Islands should relinquish direct management of WAPA, hospitals, and waste management services, advocating for private-sector efficiency under public oversight.

Government / **Published On January 30, 2025 05:38 AM /**

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V.I. Water and Power Authority's Richmond power plant. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. is adamant that the Government of the Virgin Islands needs to separate itself from the management of key public infrastructure, including the Water and Power Authority and the territory's hospitals.

As an alternative, he recommends taking a page from the V.I. Port Authority. “You know why? Because they don't manage none of their projects. They sub it all out, and their engineers just manage the subs. We have to move to a model like that, because Carlton Dowe has been extremely successful in getting his projects done,” he told the Consortium in an exclusive interview on Wednesday evening.

The conversation stemmed from the Consortium’s observation that the Water and Power Authority has had a less-than-stellar record of managing its projects, including the [ill-fated contract](#) with VITOL to build propane infrastructure on St. Thomas. A 2019 Inspector General audit found that the project was riddled with wastage and represented acute incompetence by those managing it. Subsequently, WAPA’s financial circumstances became dire enough to warrant the declaration of a [power-related state of emergency](#) in 2024. But despite the stabilization of recent supply shortages and a recent influx of cash in WAPA’s coffers, Governor Bryan agrees that the status quo must change.

“We need to get WAPA under a management contract. The Virgin Islands owns the assets [while] we get a private company that has other companies in the states to run WAPA, and we give it to them and all the projects and let them get done,” maintained Mr. Bryan.

“WAPA is getting fixed now, so it's not going to be on anybody's radar anymore,” he said. He predicted that when power rates drop, and the troubles of WAPA are a distant memory, the territory’s future leadership may share opposing sentiments from what he offers now. “We should keep WAPA. It's a government entity. It belongs to us,” is what he anticipates the refrain will be. However, he maintained that the prudent thing to do was to allow a competent private sector operator to take control.

WAPA isn’t the only entity that Mr. Bryan believes could benefit from a management overhaul. “Hospitals, too. We shouldn't be in these businesses,” he told the Consortium. “We don't need to be in water. We don't need to be in power. We don't really need to be in waste management. However, he lamented the lack of support at the “legislative level” for what he calls “forward thinking” changes to how the territory approaches the provision of essential services.

“Once we get these hospitals up and built through [these bundles], we should be creating private-public partnerships to create somebody else to run the hospital,” he said. “The government won't have to be so supportive because it'll be run more efficiently.” Oversight of these PPP entities, Governor Bryan said, would be done by a “board of Virgin Islanders” to ensure that the agencies are providing adequate services to residents.

“That's far-reaching and forward-thinking, and people are resistant to that. But that's the way you get ahead,” he said. “We have to create a responsible government.” For Governor Bryan, “when I came to office, my thought was, ‘get out of all the businesses we don't need to be in’.” However, with just under two years left in his tenure, it is likely that this is a change his successor will have to contemplate.