

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Board Terminates Contract With Hugo Hodge Five Months Before Expiration

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ST. THOMAS -- In an emergency meeting called for today, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority's board of governors determined that it was in the best interest of WAPA to end its relationship with the authority's Executive Director, Hugo Hodge, some five months before his contract ends. Mr. Hodge will be out of WAPA by Friday.

That's according to a press release WAPA issued late Tuesday, which also made known that Mr. Hodge was relieved of his duties without cause, which means the board lacked good or sufficient reason to terminate the 8-year executive director, and Mr. Hodge will be paid for the remaining months.

"By unanimous vote, the Board of Governors of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority has determined that it is in the best interest of the authority and Executive Director Hugo V. Hodge, Jr. to end Mr. Hodge's relationship with the authority effective at the end of this week," reads the release. It adds: "The board thanks Director Hodge for his dedicated service over the past eight years and celebrates his many accomplishments."

The board said it has begun the process of galvanizing an executive search firm to "gather the broadest possible range of candidates for the executive director position." WAPA's Chief Financial Officer Julio Rhymer will be the acting executive director in the interim.

According to the statement, the board expects a seamless transition, and said Mr. Hodge has agreed to comply.

On January 21, the WAPA board [failed to renew](#) Mr. Hodge's contract, ending what had been a dream job for the St. Thomas native. Mr. Hodge spoke to The Consortium not too long after the failed vote, stating that it was a very difficult time for him.

"I love the Virgin Islands, and I love the Water and Power Authority," he told us approximately one week ago. "This is my dream job, it's what I wanted to do since I was age 11." The executive director said he had heard that his contract would not be renewed prior to the board meeting, "but I will digest it now. Everything is for a season," he said.

Mr. Hodge said the 598 employees currently at WAPA will attest to his dedication in changing the culture at the semi-autonomous entity — owned by the Government of the Virgin Islands — for the better. "They went above and beyond. They gave up sleep and family to help make sure that residents were taken care of." Mr. Hodge said while some may not understand what has transpired at WAPA during his tenure, the employees know his dedication. He said he had been receiving calls from friends, federal partners and WAPA employees — all saddened by the news — making the reality even harder to take in.

"Some of them are bringing tears to my eyes; but it's love. And I love the Virgin Islands," he said. "I'm taking it in, we have done a lot. I can't even describe right now what has been done. It's a tough time right now."

Mr. Hodge said he became WAPA's chief executive at a time when the world was going through the most difficult economic downturn in a generation. Since then, he said, he's overseen numerous changes at WAPA, including the constructing of solar farms, the conversion of WAPA's water system from thermal to reverse osmosis, and now the LPG project, [which just received the green light](#) from the Army Corps of Engineers.

"Before my tenure is up we'll have a system running on propane, and that's not to mention [the AMI meter](#) and other projects. I love what we've done and I love what's transpiring at WAPA," Mr. Hodge said, referring to supposed improvements underway at the entity.

Asked if WAPA was in a better place after leading it for eight years, Mr. Hodge was emphatic: "By far it's in a stronger position. We're coming from the toughest, most difficult recession that the world had ever seen, and the improvements at WAPA are vast. Even

now an [RFP \(request for proposal\) is going out](#) in our effort to fix the water discoloration issue.”

“I wish the next person the best of luck,” Mr. Hodge continued. “People have said many things, but I made it a priority to not have a generator at my house,” he revealed, explaining his willingness to remain vulnerable even as WAPA’s chief executive, to power outages. “We’ve done miracles; even with all the monies that we are owed.”

Lastly, Mr. Hodge said he wanted to send a strong message to Virgin Islanders leaving abroad, hoping to encourage them not to be deterred by what had transpired with him. He urged them to come home and contribute to the building of the territory.

“My message to the young people living abroad is to come home. Don’t let what happened with me deter you. Come home and make a difference. I want them know that my tenure at WAPA was eight years of improving the territory,” he concluded.

Voting against renewing the contract at last week's meeting was member Elizabeth Armstrong, Commissioners Devin Carrington and Gustav James and Director Marvin Pickering. Voting for renewal were Board Chairman Gerald Groner, Esq., Vice Chair Juanita Young, member Cheryl Boynes Jackson and Noel Loftus.