

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Has Julio Rhymer Been Removed From WAPA? Officials Won't Say

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At least one top Mapp administration official has told The Consortium that talk has been circulating in their ranks that Julio Rhymer, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority's executive director, was being removed from WAPA. Two other well-placed sources said Mr. Rhymer was not being fired, but rather shuffled to a government department or agency dealing with finances. The Office of Management and Budget and the Bureau of Internal Revenue are two government arms being mentioned.

The discussion apparently came during an executive board meeting WAPA held following its regular meeting on Friday, where the company [took action](#) on multiple items. But Jean P. Greaux, Jr., WAPA's director of corporate communications, told The Consortium on

Saturday evening that while everything appeared normal during the regular board meeting proceedings, which Mr. Greaux said was attended by Mr. Rhymer, Mr. Greaux was not present when the board reported out of the executive session -- where the discussions ostensibly occurred -- and where action was taken on a personnel item and legal representation.

"Everything looked normal to me," Mr. Greaux said, referring to the regular meeting.

Samuel Carrion, acting Mapp administration spokesman, said he could not confirm or deny whether Mr. Rhymer was being removed because he did not have information on the rumor.

And although the talk of Mr. Rhymer's ouster has dominated discussions over the past few days, there's also a rumor that he was not actually removed, but suspended.

If Mr. Rhymer was relieved of his duties as WAPA's executive director, the big question is why? For one, there's a letter that has been circulating on social media said to be from WAPA employees calling for the WAPA board to remove Mr. Rhymer for a myriad of reasons, among them favoritism, brash treatment of employees and an exodus of top WAPA employees who have left or are leaving the company, the letter suggests, because of Mr. Rhymer. None of the allegations have been confirmed to be true, however.

There has also been talk that the utility's goal of restoring 90 percent of its customers by Christmas will not be met, a failure that would reflect badly on the Mapp administration.

Mr. Rhymer had served as interim executive director of WAPA since January 26, following the board's dismissal of Hugo Hodge, Jr. Mr. Rhymer was [formerly given the executive director position](#) on August 2, and has held it since then. Under his tenure, the company has focused on purchasing [power generation units](#) that the board said would benefit the utility as well as its customers in the long run. But the company has had problems paying its propane suppliers, and had [reverted to oil](#) -- which WAPA spent [over \\$150 million trying to move away from](#) -- to keep its customers energized.

Even so, WAPA's efforts -- and by extension Mr. Rhymer's -- to restore the territory following Hurricanes Irma and Maria have been met mostly with praise. Mr. Rhymer has visited Congress twice following the storms, where he testified before lawmakers on the need for WAPA to harden its power distribution systems against future storms, and of WAPA's funding needs to keep the company operational.

At the first hearing, Mr. Rhymer briefly spoke of the USVI's history with hurricanes, stating that "a hurricane passes near the U.S. Virgin Islands, on average, every three years, and makes a direct hit on the islands, on average, every eight years."

But he honed in on WAPA's most immediate need, funding, and conveyed effectively that without the continued assistance of the federal government through FEMA, and at least until WAPA is able to restore the entire territory, the semiautonomous company would collapse.

"The V. I. Water and Power Authority has recurring expenses such as payroll, insurance, operation and maintenance of the plants, debt service, previously executed contracts, as well as financing agreements we must pay. To address these expenses, the authority

through the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands, has sought a Community Disaster Loan. Any support or assistance that you can offer in this regard is appreciated,” Mr. Rhymer said.

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