

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan on Kupfer's Departure From WAPA: Residents Got What They Asked For, But it Won't Be Cheap to Fill Position

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Aerial view of WAPA's Richmond plant. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Governor Albert Bryan acknowledged that WAPA CEO and Executive Director, Lawrence Kupfer, who started his tenure at WAPA [on March 1, 2018](#), has asked the board not to renew his three-year, over \$200,000 a year contract, which expired on Sunday, as [previously reported by the Consortium](#).

Mr. Bryan, speaking during the administration's weekly Covid-19 press briefing Monday, said he agreed with the general consensus among Virgin Islanders that new faces are

needed at the beleaguered authority, though he refrained from chastising WAPA Board Chairman Anthony Thomas and board member Noel Loftus for voting against a motion that defunded a top management position and terminated the employee holding the post, Gregory Rhymer. In fact, Mr. Bryan offered a reason for the two board members' support of Mr. Rhymer, even though their effort to save Mr. Rhymer's special advisor to the CEO position failed 7-2.

"I think that [Anthony Thomas and Noel Loftus] feel that Mr. Rhymer is a credit to the authority," Mr. Bryan said. "But the board definitely has an opportunity now to give the public what the public wants. They want to see new leadership at WAPA."

Insiders tell the Consortium that the vote on Thursday capped a long-held belief by members of the board that frequently repeated allegations of corruption and malfeasance against Mr. Rhymer should be thoroughly and independently investigated, an effort that has won little support from Mr. Thomas. In fact, at a mid-January meeting, again in a closed-door executive session, board members approved a motion for Mr. Kupfer to work alongside the authority's Internal Audit Division to probe the allegations against Mr. Rhymer. However, that investigation was never initiated.



WAPA Executive Director and CEO, Lawrence Kupfer. (Credit: VI Legislature)

Mr. Bryan said a number of positions are open at the authority because of persons who resigned or were forced to leave. However, he also said that some of those persons may still have job opportunities elsewhere in the authority. The Consortium has learned that Mr. Kupfer is preparing to slip Mr. Rhymer into another leadership position at WAPA. The outgoing executive director, who will remain at WAPA for 90 days to allow the authority to find new leadership, plans on naming Mr. Rhymer as the authority's chief administrative officer, filling a vacancy brought by the resignation of Rupert Pelle in February. The naming of Mr. Rhymer as the chief administrative officer would make him an officer of the authority. In that position, he would oversee the procurement division, property management, and security, among other operational areas.

"We're going to see a whole new leadership team emerge at WAPA. I don't think that that means the people who were there are valueless, and they have other opportunities in the organization that they may be able to use them for," said the governor, comments that could serve as indicators for WAPA board members.

He added, "But we definitely agree with the public from the stance that they want to see some real things happen at WAPA and really push the organization forward.

"I think it's, like I call it, a Crips and Blood mentality. There are people in and around the organization that have a lot of emotion tied to the organization that is hindering the growth of WAPA. So sometimes fresh faces, fresh blood, new relationships will allow the agency to grow."

Mr. Bryan said while WAPA would soon realize new leadership, Virgin Islanders should know that the cost to fill leadership roles, more pointedly the chief executive and executive director position, would not come cheap.

"My continued concern is it's very hard to find talent, and it's very pricy to find talent," he said. "And as we look forward to new leadership coming on, I hope the public is going to be as supportive of the new kind of resources in terms of salary that it takes to attract and retain some of the talent we're going to need to take WAPA out of its fiscal woes, as well as its power generation woes."