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# Senator Challenges WAPA CEO on Communication With Employees During Hearing Discussing Progress at the Authority

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**WAPA's Richmond Powerplant. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM**

Andrew Smith, who was appointed CEO of the V.I. Water and Power Authority in January was told by Senator Franklin Johnson that he needs to make time to talk and listen to his employees, contending that the new executive could learn a lot from them.

"Make time for your people. These men and women in WAPA work very hard, please find time to meet to talk with them, you will learn a lot," Mr. Johnson told Mr. Smith Friday during a meeting of the Committee on Disaster Recovery & Infrastructure.

During the meeting, the committee received testimony from WAPA regarding the status of all disaster-related projects in the territory.

However, Mr. Johnson told the committee that he had been attempting to meet and discuss a constituent's issue with the chief executive but was unable to set a date and time before Fridays' hearing. Two of Mr. Johnson's gripes were information from employees that they have been unable to meet with Mr. Smith to discuss work-related challenges, and the other was about a customer who paid \$13,000 to WAPA and as of Friday had yet to be connected.

Mr. Smith was unable to attend the committee's Friday meeting in person because he had previously scheduled travel. Before joining WAPA, Mr. Smith served as a consultant to the utility industry focusing on financial best practices.

Mr. Johnson told committee members that he was displeased with what he described as the new CEO's improper attitude. "I got complaints from some of your employees. They've tried to have a meeting with you and are not getting through. I have to believe them because WAPA is creating hardship for people," said Mr. Johnson, who also pointed out Mr. Smith's [failure to communicate](#) with representatives from the Gov't Employees' Retirement System.

In his update, Mr. Smith told lawmakers, "My commitment to you as the new leadership of the Water and Power Authority is to have transparent and open discussions with our stakeholders, and to provide our stakeholders with accurate facts and figures so that our stakeholders can understand the challenges that the Water and Power Authority faces as well as the opportunities that we are pursuing."

The authority, Mr. Smith said has undertaken several multi-year projects to address issues of resiliency, redundancy, efficiency, and general modernization of power production facilities, including hardening its transmission and distribution capabilities.

They include the hazard mitigation projects that are designed to address key areas of the authority's infrastructure that were severely impacted by the 2017 storms. According to Mr. Smith, these projects include undergrounding a substantial portion of the existing electrical overhead transmission and distribution system; interconnecting critical facilities and residential customers to the newly installed underground systems; hardening the remaining overhead systems with composite poles; and hybridizing the generation mix to incorporate smaller and more efficient units, battery storage systems and renewable energy resources.