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# Senate Overrides Governor's Veto to Fund Audit of V.I. Water and Power Authority

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**Propane tanks started arriving at WAPA in on Oct. 5, 2014.**

Senate Majority Leader Kenneth Gittens has successfully led an override of a bill previously vetoed by Governor Albert A. Bryan Jr., allowing the V.I. Inspector General's Office to receive a \$250,000 fund. The funds will be allocated to the audit of various operations of the V.I. Water & Power Authority.

Governor Bryan had twice vetoed the measure, which calls for the Inspector General to scrutinize WAPA's contract with propane supplier VITOL, the AMI meter reading contract, and the inquiry into \$2 million reportedly lost to an "offshore account."

In a release issued Wednesday, Gittens emphasized the need for transparency and reform within WAPA. "We must continue to seek accountability at WAPA on behalf of the people. There must be a fundamental change of the culture of waste, fraud, and abuse within the utility where these bad contracts, major losses, and cost overruns were allowed to happen," he said.

The veto override and the original bill were both unanimously supported by the legislative body, and co-sponsored by Senators Angel L. Bolques Jr., Diane T. Capehart, Carla J. Joseph, Marvin A. Blyden, Javan E. James, Sr., and Franklin D. Johnson.

In addition to the override, the Legislature's Division of Legal Counsel issued an opinion on the public accessibility of WAPA's infrastructure buyout agreement with VITOL. The opinion, published on Wednesday, clarified that WAPA cannot withhold information regarding the use of public funds. Despite senators voting on April 14, 2023, to allocate \$45 million towards WAPA's settlement agreement with VITOL, WAPA has been reticent in sharing details of its agreement, Gittens said.

Gittens was vocal in his opposition to the monetary provision for WAPA, stating, "I could not in good conscience support paying a company off that I believe we should be investigating." The senator cited concerns with VITOL's contract costs for WAPA's propane conversion, originally slated to cost \$87 million and reduce rates, but later ballooning to over \$200 million with no visible decrease in rates.

The Majority Leader also sponsored a measure aimed at maintaining staffing levels at the Caribbean Kidney Center until the V.I. government can take ownership. The center, which provides essential dialysis treatment to hundreds of patients across the territory, will receive a \$700,000 appropriation to the Department of Health for the employment of nurses and other staff members.

Reflecting on the successful override and his sponsored bill, Gittens said, "I am very pleased that we were able to find a way to assist the patients in continuing to get the treatment they need."