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## Bryan Approves 2024 Budget Bill; \$25 Million in Retro Payments Included

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. recently signed off on 30 bills that the 35th Legislature passed in its September 22nd session. Among these bills are agreements between the Virgin Islands government and various health insurance companies, along with appropriations for multiple government agencies, boards, and commissions.

A significant highlight of the approved bills is the authorization allowing the administration to allocate \$25 million in fiscal years 2023 and 2024. This allocation aims to address the continued payment of retroactive wages, which have been owed to eligible government employees for decades.

Mr. Bryan expressed his gratitude towards the Senate Finance Committee and all the members of the 35th Legislature for their dedication and efforts concerning the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget in his transmittal letter to Senate President Novelle E. Francis Jr.

However, he also exercised his line-item veto authority on several sections of the bills. In Bill No. 35-0141, he vetoed references to the Government Insurance Fund in Sections P and R, emphasizing that these amounts have already been appropriated in Bill No. 35-0156. The governor also struck out the allocation for “VIPD Police Athletic League STX \$8,000”, stating that this subsection is redundant since it mirrors appropriations listed elsewhere in the bill. Moreover, he pointed out a typographical error in the VITEMA allocation in Section G, and indicated corrections in the total amounts for VIPD, Section T.

In another bill, No. 35-0171, Governor Bryan used his veto power to strike Sections 8 and 9, concerning the placement of underground storage tanks near water wells. He remarked that the Department of Planning and Natural Resources hadn't been consulted about these amendments, and they also conflicted with the existing 12 VIC 657(a). Furthermore, the governor vetoed Section 12(a) for being more restrictive than the current language and highlighted a missing sum in Section 5(b) for the construction and repair of Contentment Road.

Mr. Bryan has urged the Legislature to revisit his recommendations promptly.

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