

DeGraff Pushes to Repeal VIPOCC Laws After Public Officials' Salary Increases Take Effect

Senator Dwayne DeGraff calls for a special session to repeal Acts 7878 and 8384, criticizing automatic raises for public officials amidst fiscal challenges, including unpaid wages, tax refunds, and vendor obligations.

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Senator Dwayne DeGraff By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Senator Dwayne DeGraff on Tuesday called on Senate President Novelle Francis to convene a special session to repeal Acts 7878 and 8384, the laws governing the V.I. Public Officials Compensation Commission (VIPOCC). In addition, DeGraff has circulated a petition among his colleagues to compel action. If the petition receives signatures from eight members, Senate

President Francis would be required to call the session. DeGraff voiced strong opposition to the recent salary increases for public officials, which took effect on January 1, 2025, citing fiscal challenges and a lack of transparency in the process.

Mr. DeGraff stated in a press release that he never received a copy of the VIPOCC report before it was made public in a January 6 press release from the Governor's Office. He criticized the process, asserting that the report was not properly transmitted to the Legislature as required by law.

"Considering the myriads of issues facing our territory," DeGraff said, "implementing salary increases on January 1, 2025, poses a major problem considering the 2025 budget has already been enacted." He outlined several pressing fiscal challenges, including:

- Nonpayment of income taxes for several years.
- Nonpayment of retroactive wages owed to government employees.
- Utilization of public funds to address WAPA's state of emergency.
- A potential shortfall in GERS funding from rum cover-over monies.
- Nonpayment of vendor obligations totaling millions.
- Delayed salary increases for government employees.

Mr. DeGraff revealed that during the December 2024 session, members of the Senate majority approached him to seek his support for wage increases for senators. He stated that he disagreed with the request and refused to allow the proposal to proceed in his absence. As a result, the proposal was not presented.

Mr. DeGraff expressed strong opposition to the automatic implementation of the raises, stating, "This Administration has failed to address key financial obligations to the public, and the timing of these salary adjustments is unacceptable."

Act 7878, amended by Act 8384, requires the VIPOCC to consider multiple factors when determining compensation adjustments for public officials, including:

- Cost of living and median household income.
- The financial ability of the territory to meet these costs.
- Interests and welfare of the public.
- Current compensation levels and other benefits received by public officials.

Mr. DeGraff emphasized that the commission must submit a report with its recommendations to the Governor, Senate President, and Chief Justice by May 1 of the fourth year of each term. The senator criticized the failure to follow these procedures, adding, "Transparency and accountability are essential to rebuilding trust in our government."

DeGraff urged the Senate President to convene a special session to repeal Acts 7878 and 8384 and called on his colleagues to support the repeal. "For all the above stated enacted language and the present fiscal structure of the territory, these raises must be rescinded," DeGraff said.

The senator reiterated his commitment to addressing the territory's financial challenges and ensuring that public officials' compensation reflects the Virgin Islands' economic realities.

