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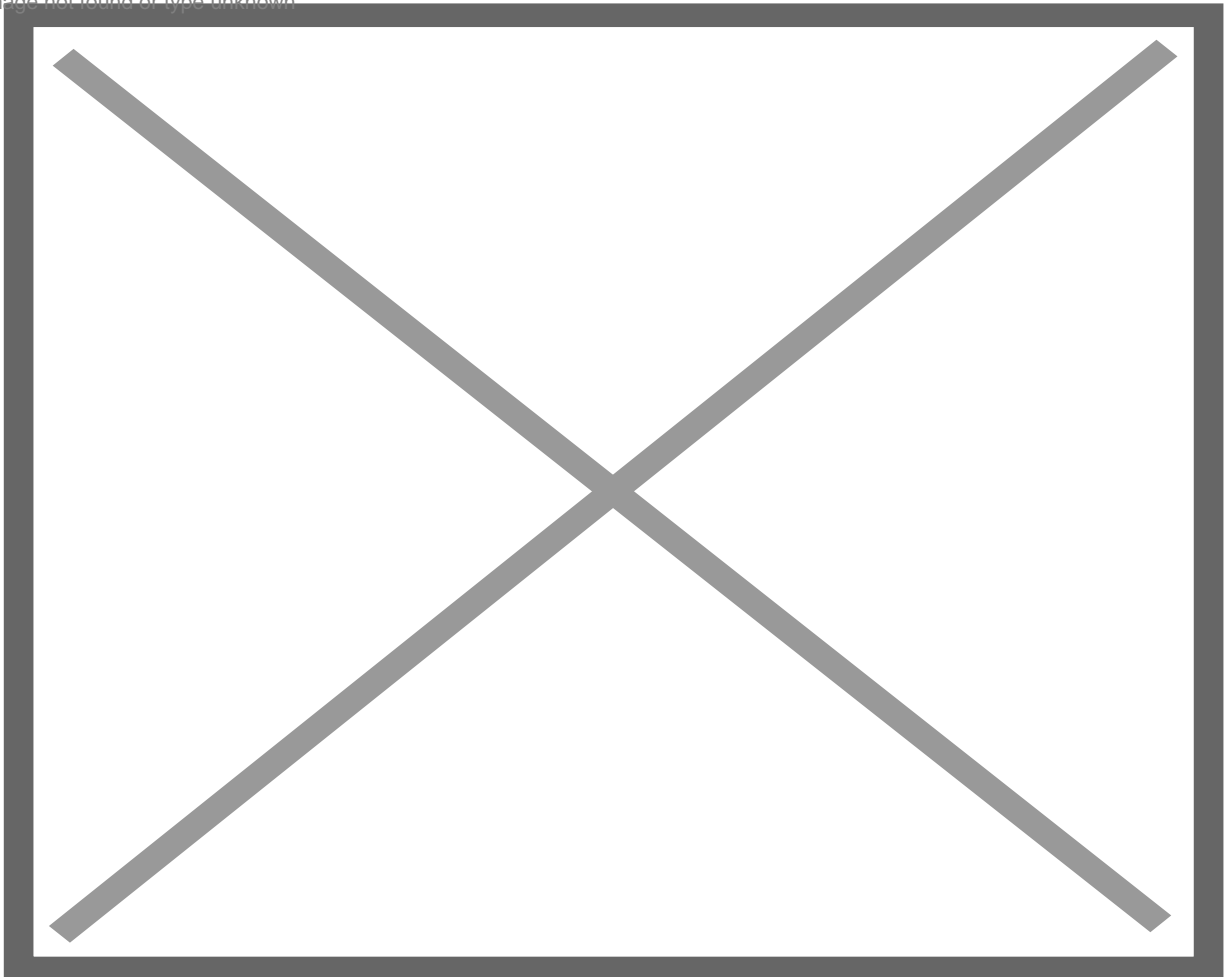
VIPOCC Clarifies No Raise for Senators; \$95,000 Salary Reflects Senate President Pay as Governor and Lt. Governor Receive Increases

The commission clarified that no adjustments were made for legislative roles, while automatic raises for the governor and lieutenant governor took effect, sparking public criticism over fiscal priorities.

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The Earl B. Ottley Legislature Building in St. Thomas. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

The V.I. Public Officials Compensation Commission (VIPOCC) has issued a statement clarifying its work, process, and recommendations regarding salary adjustments for public officials. The statement comes amid public scrutiny and frustration over the recent implementation of salary increases for the governor, lieutenant governor, and other officials, which took effect on January

1, 2025.

According to VIPOCC Chair Haldane Davies, the commission completed its work and submitted its report on August 13, 2024, to Senate President Novelle Francis Jr., Chief Justice Rhys Hodge, and Governor Albert Bryan Jr. The report outlines the research, findings, and recommendations for adjusting compensation for 12 of the 41 positions reviewed.

VIPOCC emphasized the challenges it faced, including delays caused by a lack of allocated funding in revised legislation. The commission could only proceed after securing the necessary funds and signing a contract with the selected consulting firm, Gallagher, which began work on September 20, 2023.

The report recommends compensation adjustments totaling \$199,005 for 12 positions across the three branches of government. Notably, Mr. Davies said it does not recommend adjustments for positions within the Legislature or Judiciary.

VIPOCC clarified that the referenced \$95,000 salary reflects the current compensation of the Senate President, who serves as the head of the Legislature. No changes were proposed for this position or any other legislative roles. Similarly, the report advises maintaining the standard compensation practices for the Judiciary as established for state courts.

The salary increases have sparked significant public backlash, with concerns about the timing, process, and fiscal priorities of the territory. Critics have pointed to unresolved issues such as unpaid retroactive wages, delayed tax refunds, and vendor payments.

Under Act 8384, the Legislature had a 90-day window to act on VIPOCC's recommendations, either by accepting, rejecting, or amending them. However, the absence of any legislative action during this period allowed the recommendations to take effect automatically.

The issue is further complicated by Senate President Novelle Francis's claims that he never received the VIPOCC report. Despite these assertions, the Consortium obtained an email showing that Francis, along with Governor Bryan and Chief Justice Hodge, was among the recipients of the report on August 13, 2024. The email's existence has raised questions about communication and accountability between the commission and government leaders.

VIPOCC's statement aimed to clarify the timeline and scope of its work while addressing some of the misconceptions surrounding its recommendations. However, public frustration continues to grow, with calls for greater transparency and accountability in the process.

The salary increases remain a contentious issue as residents and lawmakers grapple with balancing fiscal responsibility and the need to attract and retain skilled public officials.