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## Outgoing Senate President Urges “Humility” and “Purpose” Amid Salary Scandal as 36th Legislature Prepares for Oath of Office

**Novelle Francis Jr., who faced scrutiny over salary increases allegedly enacted without proper review, calls on lawmakers to prioritize collaboration and the welfare of Virgin Islanders during the 36th Legislature.**

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**Outgoing Senate President Novelle Francis Jr. In the 35th Legislature, he will lead the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE**

On Sunday, senators and senators-elect of the 36th Legislature gathered at the Cruz Bay Seventh Day Adventist Church in St. John for the first of three events to swear lawmakers in. The pre-

swearing-in ecumenical service precedes Monday's official swearing-in ceremony at Emancipation Garden, St. Thomas. On Wednesday, a commemorative ceremony will take place in the Frits. E Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room on St. Croix.

In his final remarks as president of the 35th Legislature, Senator Novelle Francis Jr. told his colleagues that “today we gather to mark the beginning of a new chapter in our legislative journey; a chapter that brings with it a weight of responsibility, the promise of progress, and the hope of a brighter future for all Virgin Islanders.”

Mr. Francis will now serve as the chair of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance, previously led by outgoing [Senator Donna Frett-Gregory](#) who did not seek reelection in the November 2024 election. Neither did [Senator Javan James](#). Senators Diane Capehart and Samuel Carrion failed to win over sufficient voters to secure another term in the territory's lawmaking branch. In their place, senators-elect Kurt Vialet, Avery Lewis, Hubert L. Frederick, and Clifford A. Joseph will serve the people of the Virgin Islands. [Senator Milton Potter will replace Mr. Francis as Senate President.](#)

“You bring a fresh perspective, ideas, and energy to this esteemed body. Your voices will be vital as we chart the course ahead,” said Senator Francis to his incoming Senate colleagues. To returning legislators, he assured them their “experience and commitment to public service will undoubtedly continue to guide us to make informed decisions for the betterment of our community.” He reminded elected lawmakers of their “shared mission to serve the people who have entrusted us with their confidence, their aspirations, and their dreams.”

Like the 35th Legislature, legislators in the 36th Legislature of the Virgin islands are expected to pay keen interest to economic growth, healthcare, public safety, education, and environmental sustainability. “Let us remember our duty transcends politics. It is about collaboration, integrity and the unwavering commitment to improving the lives of those we serve,” advised Senator Francis, stressing the importance of “respectful discourse” in the face of disagreements. The welfare of Virgin Islanders, he said, should remain “at the forefront of our actions.”

Mr. Francis recently [faced significant public scrutiny](#) over salary increases recommended by the V.I. Public Officials Compensation Commission (VIPOCC), which allegedly took effect without a Senate hearing as required by law. The raises included over \$40,000 each for the governor and lieutenant governor, along with notable increases for cabinet members. These salary adjustments automatically took effect after a 90-day window for legislative review elapsed. However, Mr. Francis as Senate president, stated that he never received the report, despite the VIPOCC confirming multiple times that it had sent the document on August 13, 2024, to Mr. Francis, Governor Albert Bryan, and Supreme Court Chief Justice Rhys Hodge. The Consortium [obtained an email thread](#) confirming Mr. Francis's receipt of the report, with his correct email address included.

A legal opinion requested by Senator Kenneth Gittens concluded that the [raises were invalid due to the improper submission](#) of the report to the Senate. However, this opinion is based on Mr. Francis's claim that he did not receive the email—a premise that, if contested in court, could potentially be disproven through the discovery process.

“Together, as the 36th Legislature, we have the opportunity to enact meaningful change and build a legacy of progress for generations to come,” was Mr. Francis's guidance. He appealed to the members of the Legislature to conduct their duties with humility, purpose, and a steadfast commitment to justice and equity.” “Let this session be remembered as a time where leadership,

vision, and action converge to move the Virgin Islands forward,” he said.

Monday’s official swearing-in ceremony will be live-streamed, allowing Virgin Islanders at home and abroad to view the oath of office being taken by the fifteen men and women responsible for creating and amending the territory’s laws.

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