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Blyden Offended by Public Sentiment on VIPOCC Salary Recommendations

Blyden expressed frustration over the public's reaction to VIPOCC salary recommendations during the 36th Legislature's first sitting, emphasizing his commitment to working for the people while addressing concerns about transparency and economic priorities

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Senator Marvin Blyden at the 36th Legislature's swearing-in ceremony in St. Thomas on January 13, 2025. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Comments made by Senator Marvin A. Blyden in the first sitting of the 36th Legislature may have fanned the flames of discontent currently felt by Virgin Islanders over salary increases recommended by the V.I. Public Officials Compensation Commission (VIPOCC).

These salary adjustments – including increases of over \$40,000 for the governor and lieutenant governor – took effect on January 1, after the [legislature failed to review](#) the recommendations within the stipulated window. According to then-Senate President Novelle Francis Jr., he never received the email. A subsequent legal opinion requested by Senator Kenneth Gittens [contends that the raises are invalid](#) as the Senate was purportedly never in receipt of the report. However, the initial claim by Senator Francis has seemingly been debunked, with the Consortium obtaining an [email thread](#) that appears to show that Senator Francis did receive the electronic correspondence.

During Monday’s legislative session that followed the official swearing-in ceremony, Mr. Gittens again stood his ground stating: “Although we all may deserve it, no pay raises at this time. “No pay raises for top-level government officials until the economic landscape of this territory changes for the better of us all.” He was among several lawmakers, including independent senators Alma Francis Heyliger and Dwayne DeGraff, who called for transparency in any discussions on salary increases, asserting that raises for these public servants would be an affront to Virgin Islanders owed millions in tax returns and retroactive payments.

Senator Marvin Blyden, however, seemed to have a unique perspective where salary increases are concerned. “We had the conversation for the past couple weeks in terms of the salary – \$10,000 salary increase – everybody gone crazy,” he said, sharing his observation. The VIPOCC has since clarified that lawmakers were in fact [not recommended to receive a pay hike](#). Nevertheless, Mr. Blyden lamented the apparent lack of public backlash against increases for commissioners of various government departments. “I feel a way. I never asked for no raise. None of us asked for a raise,” Senator Blyden declared on Monday, becoming increasingly impassioned in his remarks.

According to Mr. Blyden, the prevailing public sentiment “really [showed] me what many people feel about and think about us. It is what it is, and I understand.” Nonetheless, he affirmed that he “respects their position” and will “stay in the grain and work hard, go above and beyond, and give 100% of my time, because you are my bosses.”

The lawmaker, who retains his position as chair of the Committee on Housing, Transportation, and Telecommunications, repeated his commitment to improving the quality of life in the Virgin Islands and tackling “low-hanging fruit.” He seemed aware of increasing disenchantment among the electorate, referencing low-voter turnout figures of only 49% in the November 2024 general election. “Many people didn't vote for us. You saw today in [Emancipation] Garden and in St. John. No one came out. I understand what they’re going through and how they feel.”

“We understand your plight,” he said, addressing the public. “We are in the same boat...Let’s walk together. Give me a little support now and then,” he appealed to those who may have been watching or listening to the proceedings.

The conversation on salary increases and their propriety at this time mostly ended with the comments from Senators Blyden and Gittens. Senator Kurt Vialet was the only one to react to Senator Blyden’s impassioned remarks, commenting that his colleague “spoke raw truth” that “a lot that individuals at times are silent to say because of political repercussions.”