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Bryan Wants \$20 Million Sports Complex Funds Used for Retro Pay, Senators Say No

Governor Bryan proposes redirecting \$20 million from a planned sports complex to cover decades-old retroactive payments, but lawmakers reject the idea, arguing that funds for retro pay were previously allocated and misused by the administration

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. By. GOVERNMENT HOUSE

The government's failure to complete retroactive payments dating back several decades remains a point of contention for Virgin Islands taxpayers. The matter of outstanding payments was addressed during Governor Albert Bryan's seventh State of the Territory Address on Monday – but perhaps not in the manner that several hoped for.

“I understand that the retro is needed, and we want to pay it,” he began. “This is a 40-year-old debt that we still owe \$100 million on.” However, Governor Bryan maintained that “we have to spread the wealth around and ensure that all our residents benefit from the tax rolls.” According to him, the pressing need of “keeping the lights on and tackling inflation” has prevented the Government of the Virgin Islands from paying out the [promised \\$25 million in retroactive payments](#) each year. “We simply cannot afford to pay it using the general fund,” he admitted.

Governor Bryan, however, proposed a solution – one that would require the partnership and permission of the 36th Legislature. “Senators, we can pay it using the proceeds from recently settled lawsuits,” he suggested, referencing the [proceeds awarded to the territory](#) from Epstein-related lawsuits. “Instead of building yet another gymnasium in Estate Nazareth, next to the one at Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, we can take that cash and pay the retirees \$20 million,” Governor Bryan proposed.

[Bill 35-0380](#), passed in the 35th Legislature, appropriates \$21.5 million to the Department of Public Works for the completion of the Estate Nazareth Sports Complex, a measure first proposed by former senator Donna Frett-Gregory. Governor Bryan, however, considered it unnecessary and duplicative at this time. “As I have said many times before, we have enough capital projects to last another 15 years. Let us use this money to address our inflation woes and our obligation to our retirees and forgo yet another gymnasium.”

“We already have over \$20 billion in construction to effectuate. Let’s use this money to get our finances in order,” he said later in the address. “Send me the bill and I will pay the retro immediately!” Governor Bryan declared.

Based on the reactions of lawmakers, however, it is unlikely that any legislation of that nature will land on the governor’s desk.

“In the 35th Legislature, we appropriated \$25 million for retroactive pay, and the governor went and he used it how he wanted, without any consultation with us,” Senator Carla Joseph reminded listeners as she remarked on the State of the Territory Address.

Senator Alma Francis Heyliger, too, dismissed his request. “I didn’t really like when he went down the pathway of trying to tell the Legislature to take the \$20 million that we earmarked for the gym and pay retro,” she shared. “I don’t know if this governor has a short-term memory, but this Legislature made it our business, not once, but twice, to put into the budget monies for retro. He and his budget directors made the decision to spend the money elsewhere,” noted Senator Francis Heyliger. According to the St. Thomas senator, “within that settlement, a lot of these things were already earmarked and negotiated. The Legislature had to translate that negotiation into law to guarantee these monies were spent.”

“Maybe he needs to go find where he spent the retro money and go and put it back,” she suggested.

Senator Franklin Johnson also refused to consider the request from the territory's chief executive. “We gave it to you two times, Governor. Why would I give you a next dime for you to do what you want to do? Really?”

With lawmakers unlikely to draft such legislation, the GVI must now explore new avenues to make a dent in the millions in retroactive payments owed to the people of the territory.