

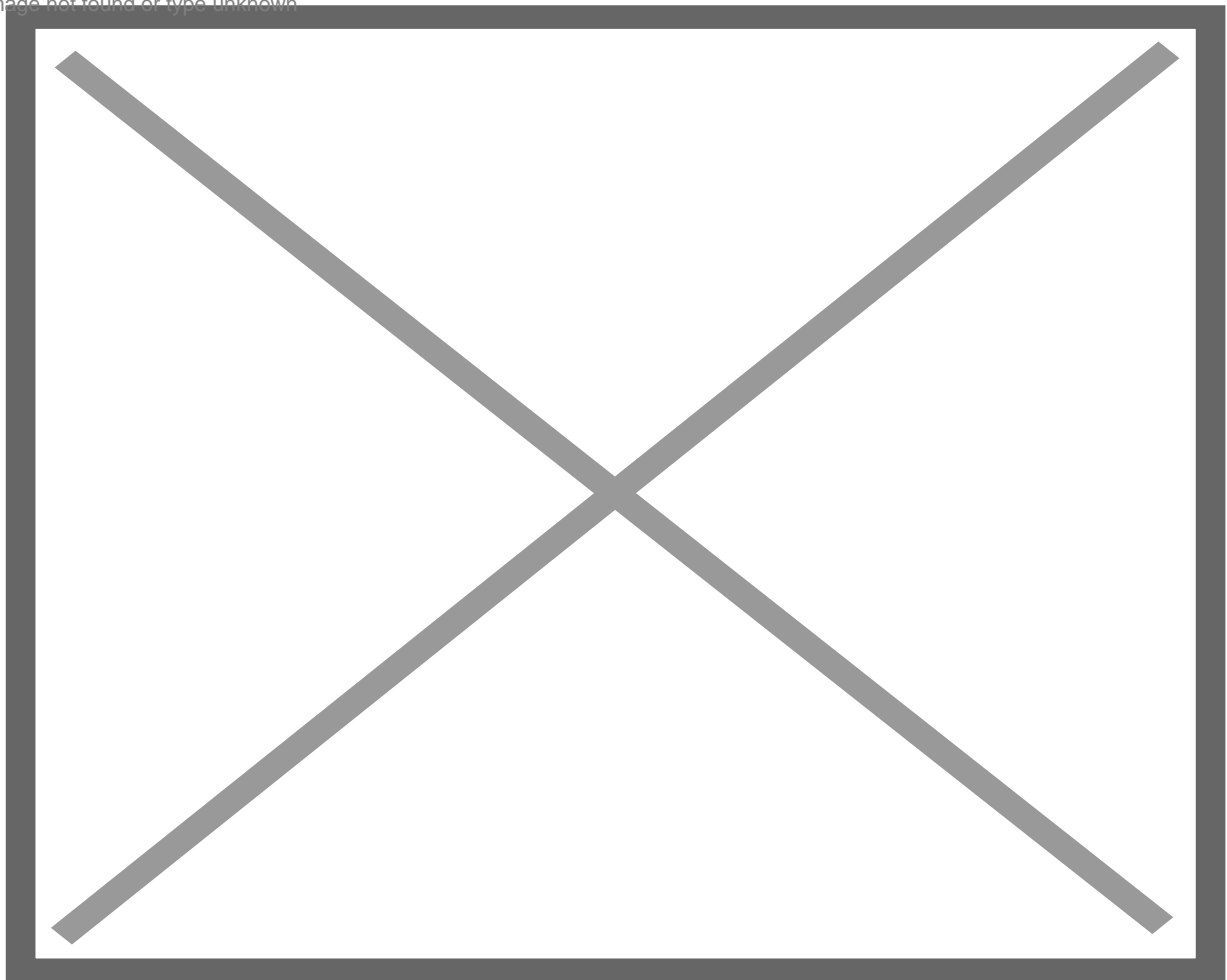
Heyliger's Push to Block Raises, Redirect WICO PILOT to Hospitals Denied in First 36th Legislature Session

Sen. Heyliger's motion to block 21.9% and 25.7% pay raises for the governor and lieutenant governor was denied, as was her effort to redirect over \$10M in unpaid WICO PILOT funds to hospitals—prompting Senator Vialet to call the proposal “phantom money.”

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Sen. Alma Francis Heyliger at Monday's 36th Legislature session, where her motions on executive pay raises and hospital funding were denied. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

In what has become a familiar pattern, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger's latest efforts to introduce legislation were rejected by a majority of her colleagues during Monday's regular session—the

first convened by the 36th Legislature.

Francis Heyliger first attempted to bring forward BR 25-0392, a bill titled “An Act to prevent and rescind any automatic implementation of salary adjustments made pursuant to any recommendations of the Virgin Islands Public Officials Compensation Commission, to reclaim any authorized payments, to establish enforcement and penalty provisions.” The measure was immediately met with objection, receiving support only from Senators Dwayne DeGraff and Franklin Johnson. The proposal aimed to block salary increases of 21.9% for the governor—from \$150,000 to \$192,088—and 25.7% for the lieutenant governor, whose salary would rise to \$168,231.

Majority Leader Senator Kurt Vialet, on a subsequent point of personal privilege, explained that the legislative body wanted the proposed bill to be fully vetted. “It’s not that we don’t want to hear the bill, but we want the bill to go through the committee process,” he clarified, recommending that the relevant parties “pro-forma it as soon as possible and send it to the committee of jurisdiction.”

After another of the Monday session’s several protracted breaks, Vialet moved that “no more special orders be considered in this session,” a proposal that received approval from the majority of the body. Francis Heyliger, who voted against the motion, sought the opinion of the Legislature’s legal counsel.

“Can the rights of a senator be taken away to cast a motion, if it’s a special order or any other type of motion. Can this body specifically restrict a senator from calling a motion?” she asked. According to the legal counsel representative, “Any senator may make a motion on this floor, and if a majority of this body agrees to that motion, that motion carries.”

Following that response, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger announced her intent to introduce a second motion—this time seeking to special order BR 25-0613, “an act appropriating all outstanding PILOT obligations owed by the West Indian Company Ltd (WICO) to the Government of the Virgin Islands for the direct benefit of the territorial hospitals.” WICO, a government-owned entity, owes the GVI over \$10 million and has been [actively seeking debt forgiveness](#). Her request to position it as the penultimate item on Monday’s agenda was denied by Senate President Milton Potter.

“Your motion is out of order,” said Senator Potter, refusing to entertain a vote. “This body ruled just two minutes ago to refrain from having any further special orders today. That was voted upon by a majority of this body.”

Senator Francis Heyliger, heard through someone else’s microphone, insisted that “you cannot deny a senator a motion,” presumably based on the response from legal counsel. Senator Kenneth Gittens could also be heard through an open mic questioning whether Ms. Francis Heyliger was “challenging the chair.” If not, she should “move on,” he suggested. Senator Gittens would subsequently rise on a point of order to remind Ms. Francis Heyliger of Rule 8(11) related to decorum. “We need to stop and move on so that we could conduct and complete the business of the people.”

Senators Alma Francis Heyliger and Kurt Vialet would butt heads a third time after Vialet sought to waive the reading of an amendment to draft legislation relating to [funding for the hospitals](#). According to Ms. Francis Heyliger, her second attempt at a special order was to direct money to the hospitals.

Mr. Violet, for his part, expressed doubt that his colleague's idea of redirecting WICO's Payment-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILOT) would be a success. "WICO ain't pay the government in over five years. Are we going to be passing phantom money?... So we're telling the hospital now to depend on what doesn't exist?" he countered.

Despite the occasional clashes, several other measures passed without challenge, including Bill 35-0038, the V.I. Port Authority's request to increase its limit for outstanding bonds from \$100 to \$500 million. An amendment made by Senator Clifford Joseph and signed onto by nearly every senator, lowered that request to \$350 million. Lawmakers also gave the stamp of approval to Bill 36-0028 relating to the extension of a lease agreement between the GVI and Tropical Marine Inc.

The following nominations were also approved:

- Dr. Safiya George – VI Government Hospital and Health Facilities Corporation, District Governing Board of St. Thomas/St. John
- Mr. Anthony Mardenborough, Jr. – Board of Career and Technical Education – St. Croix
- Mrs. Elizabeth Guadalupe-Perez – Virgin Islands Real Estate Appraisers Board
- Mrs. Trinity Granger-Austrie, EIT – University of the Virgin Islands Board of Trustees

The nominations, leases, and bills now await the signature of Governor Albert Bryan Jr.