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## Lawmakers Lose Their Cool as Salaries for Governor, Lt. Governor Climb to \$192K and \$168K Respectively; Legal Action Threatened

The governor's salary rose from \$150,000 to \$192,000, and the lieutenant governor's from \$125,000 to \$168,000, with retroactive payments dating back to December 2024—sparking legislative outrage amid delayed funding for hospitals and other public services

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Albert Bryan and Tregenza Roach pictured in 2018 following the announcement of Roach as Bryan's running mate in the gubernatorial race. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Tempers and tension flared on Friday as lawmakers learned that [controversial pay raises](#) for the governor and lieutenant governor recommended last year would soon be implemented by the Department of Personnel. The raises — which move the governor’s yearly salary from \$150,000 to \$192,000, and the lieutenant governor’s from \$125,000 to \$168,000 — will account for retroactive payments dating back to December 2024.

That detail was not included as part of Personnel Director Cindy Richardson’s initial testimony before the Senate Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance, but instead was uncovered during a line of questioning from Senator Kurt Vialet. “The raises for the lieutenant governor and the governor have been enacted, yes,” Ms. Richardson plainly stated.

Senator Kenneth Gittens described the move as “shameful and unjust.”

In January 2025, reports from the Consortium detailed the difference in opinion that arose after the publication of the report from the Public Officials Compensation Commission (VIPOCC). Then-Senate President Novelle Francis alleged that he was not in receipt of an email from VIPOCC, causing the 90-day period for approval by the Legislature to elapse, and therefore enacting the Commission’s recommendation. Former Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, who chaired the Committee on Budget, Appropriations, and Finance in the 35th Legislature, also stated that VIPOCC [failed to notify the Legislature](#) of the completion of its report.

The contention, Ms. Richardson said on Friday, was “clarified.” Senator Hubert Frederick countered, “it wasn’t clarified by us. The executive branch made a statement saying, yes, it’s the law. So this is why we’re here, there’s an impasse that this branch clearly stated that it was not recognized.”

Senate President Milton Potter promised to host a special legislative session to address the contents of the report. However, [an attempt](#) in April by Senator Alma Francis Heyliger to “prevent and rescind any automatic implementation of salary adjustments made pursuant to any recommendations of the Virgin Islands Public Officials Compensation Commission” was shot down by the majority of her colleagues.

Due to the lack of action taken by the legislative arm of government to date, the raises for the governor and lieutenant governor have moved ahead.

“With all that’s going on, we found it fitting to grant the governor of the Virgin Islands a \$42,000 raise,” lamented Senator Gittens, who told committee chair Senator Novelle Francis that he was “disappointed.” “How do we justify that?” Senator Gittens reminded listeners that various sums of money earmarked for retroactive payments and support for the hospitals, the Waste Management Authority and other entities under Act [8985](#) had not yet been paid.

“The hospitals will be paid either today or definitely before May 30,” assured Finance Commissioner Kevin Mc. Curdy.

Senator Gittens continued, “We’re going to have to position ourselves to take you to court, you know. And colleagues I’m calling on you all. We’re going to have to take them to court because this can’t go through,” he declared.

For Senator Alma Francis Heyliger, the governor’s salary simply does not compute. “The governor of California makes \$234,000 to manage 39 million people, and we’re talking about under 90,000 people, and want to pay out \$192,000. For what?” Like Senator Frederick, Senator Francis Heyliger wanted to know who “ultimately made the decision” considering the impasse

between the two branches.

“I think that's where the gray area lies,” Ms. Richardson replied.

“If a gray area exists, wouldn't it have been prudent that conversations would have been had to try to hash out this gray area,” questioned Francis Heyliger. According to DPP Director Richardson, however, “the gray area was on the side of the Legislature because it was clear, based on the Act, how it was to be submitted.”

“I don't only blame the executive branch. I blame us. I, as a member of this institution, I'm going to take part responsibility,” Francis Heyliger later stated, recalling her attempt to block the raise in a previous legislative session. “These raises are not warranted,” she argued.

“I surely hope every single man in here ready to stand up,” was Senator Franklin Johnson's clarion call. “This ain't about Governor Bryan. This is about raises that this government cannot afford... We can't pay our hospital bills, we can't take care of waste management, we can't take care of the dump, we can't take care of the very roads that the people them driving on — but yet we want to talk about giving raise and retroactive?”

“We better stand up as a body and vote for this piece of measure and then find the guts to take this battle to court. There's no reason this should go forward,” he added, referring to Bill 36-0032. The draft legislation considered by committee members would set a \$150,000 cap on the salary amount used to compute the service retirement annuity for the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor of the Virgin Islands. Six out of 7 committee members voted in favor of it on Friday.

“It's clear that every member of this body who's up here is very passionate about the fact that we have a fundamental difference in our interpretation of the law,” said Senator Milton Potter, who joined the meeting after listening to earlier portions of the conversation from his office. “There is a legal mechanism for us to pursue if we fundamentally disagree with specific actions taken by the governor, and that is something that this body will be in a position to exercise,” he said.

“Where did the money come from to give the governor the raise and retro because it wasn't in the 2025 budget?” wondered Senator Dwayne DeGraff. Commissioner Mc.Curdy could not supply an answer. “That would be a more appropriate question for the budget director,” he responded.