

## **Bryan Pushes to End Dual Pay for Lawmakers, Enable Gov't Workers to Run for Office, and Save Millions on Insurance**

**Governor Bryan will convene a special session to push for \$30M savings through self-funded insurance, bar senators from collecting both pension and salary, and repeal the law banning government employees from running for elected office.**

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**Governor Albert Bryan Jr. By. GOV'T HOUSE**

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. plans to summon the Legislature to a special session in order to discuss three priority legislative proposals – self-funded insurance for government employees, a prohibition on sitting legislators collecting retirement pensions from previous government

employment, and allowing current government workers to run for public office.

During a press briefing on Monday, Governor Bryan expounded on why he believes these measures are necessary for the territory.

Self-funding insurance, Mr. Bryan said, means the creation of a pool of money with which insurance premiums will be paid, “instead of the carrier paying the premiums.” This is expected to result in savings of over \$30 million each year, the governor said, claiming that legislative inaction on this has already cost the government “some \$50 million this year in savings.” Governor Bryan said lawmakers must now create a “special task force to assess and send out an RFP for a broker that can carry our insurance through Cigna, Blue Cross, Blue Shield, Aetna, one of these major carriers, and get it done post haste.” He assured Virgin Islanders that nothing would change on the consumer end. “It will not affect anyone's access to their doctors, nor to their coverage,” Governor Bryan promised.

The special legislative session would also be convened to debate “legislation to prohibit senators from collecting retirement benefits while serving in office,” Governor Bryan said, calling the proposal one that would create “parity” among lawmakers.

“How can it be that we have nine retired senators collecting their retirement benefits and their check?” Mr. Bryan asked. The status quo creates a scenario where some lawmakers are earning the statutory \$85,000 in annual salary, while others are taking home \$150,000 in salary and pension payments, the governor said. “Only they can do this, not even the governor could hold any other office and collect their pension.”

Governor Bryan argued that this gives lawmakers an incentive to keep their salaries relatively low, thus discouraging competition “because no-one else can afford to run.” The governor declared that this circumstance “needs to be corrected,” and called on senators to address the matter “with the same vigor that the 15 of them overrode the past two legislations,” particularly “those senators that sit there and know there's an injustice, like Alma Francis Heyliger and Avery Lewis who ain't collecting it.”

Governor Bryan contrasted these lawmakers, earning the statutory amount, against the nine including “Kenny Gittens, Milton Potter, [and] Frankie Johnson” whose bottom line is boosted due to their retirement benefits. “If you want to be elected, then you got to give up the sacrifice,” the governor declared.

The final proposal for the special session would be to strike down the law banning government workers from continuing their duties while running for the legislature. “All of them are government employees and they work the whole time while they're running,” Governor Bryan said of senators. “They travel from St. Thomas, St. Croix, go wherever they want on the government funds” while campaigning, he asserted. “Why shouldn't everybody be allowed..fair competition?”

Such an amendment to current law would encourage broader participation in elective politics, a benefit to the territory, Governor Bryan argued. “We definitely need a fresh look at who's on our legislature to really come to terms with what people are dealing with.”

Asked whether he expects to find support among lawmakers for measures that would – for some – reduce their own income and the power of incumbency, Governor Bryan responded in the affirmative. “This is about what is the right thing for people. I trust that they're going to see that,” he said. He also anticipated support for his proposal to reform how insurance for state employees

works. “We already lost the opportunity this year. We have to get quick cracking so we can get it in place as soon as possible.”

These proposals, Governor Bryan said, are all in the best interest of the territory. “If they don't think the people of the Virgin Islands are worth it, then they won't enact it,” he concluded. According to the governor, the special legislative session will convene in the next three weeks.

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