

Senate President Potter Blasts Governor Bryan's Special Session Plans, Calls Remarks Retaliatory and Misleading

Senate President Milton Potter criticized Governor Bryan's proposed special session as a press-driven response to the Legislature's repeal of his \$50K raise, saying it lacked formal communication, policy substance, and consultation with key stakeholders.

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Governor Albert Bryan, left, and Senate President Milton E. Potter, right, amid tensions over the governor's proposed special session.

ST. THOMAS — Senate President Milton E. Potter issued a sharp rebuke Wednesday in response to Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s announced intention to call the Legislature into a special session,

criticizing both the substance and style of the governor's approach.

In a strongly worded statement, Potter expressed disappointment that he first learned of the proposed special session — which would address self-funded insurance for government employees, pension restrictions for legislators, and eliminating bans on government workers seeking elected office — through media coverage rather than formal communication from the governor. "To date, the Governor has not transmitted a single piece of draft legislation, supporting documentation, or any formal communication to the Legislature regarding his stated proposals," Potter said.

Accusing the governor of prioritizing "press-driven performance" over substantive collaboration, Potter argued that the administration had failed to engage in basic respect for the Legislature's role as a co-equal branch of government. "If this administration is serious about collaboration, transparency, and reform, the process must begin with basic communication," he stated.

Potter described Bryan's recent public comments as "retaliatory and laced with personal grievance," claiming they were motivated by political spite rather than genuine policy concerns. "Let us be honest," Potter wrote, "this sudden push is a direct response to the Legislature rightfully repealing a \$50,000 salary increase that the Governor quietly inserted into the FY2024 budget."

Turning to the governor's proposal to implement a self-funded insurance model for government employees, Potter argued that while the idea may sound appealing, it is not grounded in practical realities. He pointed to serious concerns, including the government's unstable cash flow, limited reserves, and the potential for delayed payments to healthcare providers. "A misstep here would result in delayed payments to providers, eroded trust in the system, and serious legal and ethical consequences," he warned.

Potter further criticized the absence of a comprehensive vetting process, questioning whether key stakeholders such as the Commissioner of Insurance (Lieutenant Governor Roach) or the GESC Board had been consulted. "To propose such a drastic shift without comprehensive vetting and actuarial review is reckless and premature," he said.

Addressing Bryan's push to prohibit lawmakers from collecting retirement pensions while serving in office, Potter said the criticism was both misleading and legally baseless. "This practice exists across numerous jurisdictions and is grounded in law," he noted, urging the governor to submit a proper legislative proposal rather than resorting to "name-calling and shaming individual senators from the podium."

Responding to the governor's comments about government employees campaigning while employed — which included accusations that senators travel on government funds — Potter dismissed the remarks as "factually incorrect and offensive." He outlined the legislative history of the proposal to revise this prohibition, noting that it originated with former Senator Janelle Sarauw and is now championed by Senator Marise James. The bill, he said, has been stalled due to internal Democratic party resistance, not legislative neglect.

He added, "Yes, the leave-of-absence requirements merit thoughtful reconsideration, particularly in an election year. But unlike members of Congress, senators in the Virgin Islands do not go on recess. We are in active budget negotiations, required by law to pass a balanced budget by October 1. Senators must fulfill statutory duties, attend hearings, and conduct public oversight. The Governor's comparisons are flawed, and his failure to acknowledge the structural realities of

our legislative calendar once again demonstrates a troubling lack of seriousness."

In closing, Potter called for policy grounded in principle rather than political posturing. "The people of the Virgin Islands deserve principled policy, not political stunts. They deserve leadership rooted in cooperation, not combativeness," he said. "If the Governor wishes to be taken seriously, let him act like a serious leader. Until then, this body remains committed to doing the people's work — responsibly, transparently, and without theatrics."

According to Governor Bryan, the special legislative session will convene in the next three weeks.

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