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## Union Uses D. Hamilton Jackson Day to Protest Lack of Contract Renewals and Wage Increases

**During Saturday's D. Hamilton Jackson Day event in Grove Place, members of the United Steel Workers Union protested stalled contract renewals and the lack of wage increases, accusing the Bryan administration of neglecting supervisors and support staff.**

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**Members of the United Steel Workers Union, Local 9489, protest during the 2025 D. Hamilton Jackson Day celebration in Grove Place, St. Croix, calling for fair contracts and overdue wage increases. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.**

Members of the United Steel Workers Union (USW) Local 9489 used the annual D. Hamilton Jackson Day celebration in Grove Place to protest the Virgin Islands government's failure to

renew contracts and provide long-overdue wage increases for several bargaining units across the territory.

Carrying placards amid the crowd gathered to honor the labor leader and press freedom pioneer, union representatives said their protest was deliberately timed to align with Jackson's legacy of labor action and advocacy.

The local chapter includes 911 Operators, all government supervisors, support staff along with the V.I. Waste Management Union and the V.I. Lottery Union. Gerard Jackson, staff representative for the USW in the Virgin Islands, said the demonstration aimed to draw attention to years of stalled negotiations. "We're really protesting not getting our contracts renewed by the government of the Virgin Islands," he said. "Since 2009 we haven't had the increases for the Allied Health. And then we know the supervisors union has been out of a contract for over three years. We have the enforcement officers of the territory who have been out of contract within the last two years. We have the support staff basically, who's without a contract now, effective September of this year."

Jackson described repeated delays and limited progress at the bargaining table. "We've been going back and forth. Our contractors have updated the agreement, and every time we get to the table, there's always excuses of why we can't get wage increases," he said. "We find that, especially with the support staff, [they] are making more money than the supervisors that they actually are supervising, and we need to get to the table."

When asked what reasons the government had provided, Jackson said the response was always the same. "It's always no money," he said. "The supervisors' contract, basically, last year 2024 they notified us that they had no money because Mr. Rhymer was not available, basically, because he just got in," he added, referring to Office of Management & Budget Director Julio Rhymer, who was [appointed](#) September 2024 by Governor Albert Bryan Jr. "They pushed it back for a whole year, and then this year. Now they came back and they said, the governor said, do not negotiate any wages."

USW Local 9489 President Lionel Farrington said the administration's explanations are inconsistent and unfair. "The governor stated that the reason he can give us no raise at this moment is because of the [\\$35,000 increase to the rank and file](#), and also that he has a new \$25 million health insurance bill," Farrington said. "It seems like he's picking and choosing who he wants to give contracts to."

Asked about next steps, Jackson said union members intend to keep making their case publicly. "Our action [is] going be, we're going keep coming out and showing the public that we're against what the governor is doing. And we would like the community to get behind us, to help us in our endeavor, so that the governor can understand that the supervisors are people too and to make sure that we get our increases," he said.

Jackson also criticized government spending priorities, pointing to the governor's proposed funding of a personal documentary project. "If you notice in the news the other day, the governor wants to spend big government funds on funding for a film documentary of his tenure as governor, yet union employees are not getting addressed," he said. He added that commissioners have already received "basically close to \$30,000 increases," calling the situation inequitable.

"Some of these individuals are 20 or 25 in a box and have yet to get to the table," Jackson said, comparing the size of cabinet-level groups who received raises to the relatively small bargaining

units still awaiting contracts.

For the USW, the timing of the protest was intentional. As D. Hamilton Jackson once fought for fair wages and labor rights, workers say they chose this day to remind leaders that the spirit of Liberty Day demands more than commemoration — it requires action.

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