

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Still No Health Insurance Deal For Gov. Employees, Senate Action Delayed To Sept. 30

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As Sept. 30 looms, Senators of the 30 Legislature awaited a signed government health insurance contract; however, by end of business on Friday, no contract had been submitted, prompting Senate President Shawn-Michael Malone to recess the Senate until Tues., Sept. 30--the day the contract expires.

Governor de Jongh [again called](#) on the Health Insurance Board to work out a deal, even if it's an extension lasting 60 days until a more thorough agreement could be reached. If the board fails to take action, over 7,000 government employees will be left without coverage.

"The board has known since June 23rd that \$150.9 million was the most the government could pay for a one-year health insurance contract," de Jongh said. "The failure of the board to negotiate a contract that is within the government's budget limitations and or a contingency plan for when the current contract expires at the end of the month has left insurance coverage for government employees, some retirees and their dependents hanging in the balance."

Meanwhile, at the Friday senate session in St. Thomas, senators were displeased that a signed contract never arrived, forcing the legislature to delay action on the government's main budget of \$665 million, as it's impossible to know the total amount of the budget if the second-largest budget item, health insurance, is yet to be determined.

The most vocal senator at Friday's hearing was Sen. Sammuel Sanes of St. Croix, who expressed disappointment that a signed contract appeared not to be the urgency of neither the Health Insurance Board nor the de Jongh administration, adding that the board should have held marathon sessions if necessary to come up with a contract.

At press time, there was no indication that an agreement had been reached, and with the senate being adjourned until the last day of the current contract's validity--Sept. 30, Virgin Islands government employees will be in danger of losing one of the most critical workplace benefits, health insurance.