

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp's 12 Nominees Held By Senate Over Pay Raises

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"I received a good shellacking from the members of the Legislature for our miscommunications with each other. Senate President James and I have agreed to communicate in a more traditional manner going forward, as texting and emailing each other hasn't worked."

Those were the words of Governor Kenneth Mapp Wednesday evening following a meeting with members of the 31st Legislature, who, earlier that day, had voted to temporarily place on hold all 12 of Mapp's nominees for confirmation to afford a chance to meet with the governor to discuss possibly holding, lessening or altogether reversing the substantial pay raises of four of his nominees.

We are told we are on the brink of financial collapse; and when you give out raises while predicting financial collapse, you are contradicting yourself. --
Senate President Neville James

The senators' stance was unanimous in questioning the appropriateness of giving out pay raises -- one of which amounted to \$28,000 -- to the governor's nominees at a time when the governor has reminded the territory it is in the deepest financial crisis it has been in in its history.

It's a rational Sen. Kurt Violet struggled with.

"There is no methodology that I see. Is it by size of department or importance? I am trying to figure out what is the methodology for the raises," Violet said.

Governor Mapp, during his first State of the Territory address, said the territory was in [critical condition](#).

"Our territory has never been in such a state in our history," the governor said in January, speaking of the territory's financial crisis. He made known that night a budget shortfall of \$91.2 million, and revealed that his team had no money on hand to push promised initiatives of change and growth. And that's why senators are even more baffled at the lavish pay raises that's been handed out.

Senate President Neville James encapsulated the Body's feelings when he said, "We are told we are on the brink of financial collapse; and when you give out raises while contradicting yourself."



Valdamier Collens is being paid

\$125,000 annually – a \$28,000 increase over his predecessor, Angel Dawson. At \$125,000, Collens makes the same salary as Lt. Governor Osbert Potter.

One example of a pay raise that has been highlighted during the Senate's confirmation hearings is that of Finance Commissioner-nominee Valdamier Collens, who is being paid \$125,000 annually – a \$28,000 increase over his predecessor, Angel Dawson. At \$125,000, Collens makes the same salary as Lt. Governor Osbert Potter.

Sen. Clifford Graham, chair of the Finance Committee who eventually voted against temporarily holding the Mapp nominees, said he understood the idea of giving pay raises because it encourages people with the right skills to join one's team; however, Graham said the raises should have been a result of work done and not prior to performance.

Many senators expressed the same sentiments and Senate Majority Leader Sammuel Sanes voiced frustrations residents have channeled to him, contending that the government must be "cognizant" of individuals who work for government while holding other jobs to survive.

"These are the individuals who call us every day," the veteran senator said.

James eventually called for a motion to have the Mapp nominees be temporarily held, affording time to meet with the governor over the issue. Sanes made the motion, and votes are as follows:

1. Neville James ? Yes
2. Myron D. Jackson ? Yes
3. Kurt Violet ? Yes
4. Clifford F. Graham ? No
5. Tregenza A. Roach ? Yes
6. Almando "Rocky" Liburd ? Yes
7. Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly ? Yes
8. Novelle E. Francis ? Yes
9. Jean Forde ? Yes
10. Marvin Blyden ? Yes
11. Justin Harrigan ? Yes
12. Kenneth "Kenny" Gittens ? No
13. Terrence "Positive" Nelson ? Yes
14. Sammuel Sanes ? Yes
15. Janette Millin Young ? Yes

According to information released from Government House, members of the 31st Legislature and the governor agreed to engage in discussions more regularly, and Mapp has asked the senators for their support on each of his nominations.

Mapp described the meeting with senators after the vote as "positive, productive and progressive."

"It was a good and productive discussion and I look forward to more regular meetings with members of the 31st Legislature," the governor said.