

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senator Roach, Game-Changer For Democrats, Issues Statement On Failed Mapp Cabinet Nominees

Politics / **Published On May 23, 2015 01:45 PM /**

Ernice Gilbert **May 23, 2015**



ST. THOMAS -- While Senate Democrats celebrate their victory of successfully failing 11 of Governor Kenneth Mapp's cabinet nominees citing a salary increase impasse with the governor, it was Sen. Tregenza A. Roach, an independent from St. Thomas, who made all the difference on Thursday, becoming that critical 8th vote the Democrats needed to deny the candidates their high-paying positions.

But Roach's decision was not based on persuasion from the Democrats as the legislator has consistently voted against the nominees. He also rejects the idea that the salaries of cabinet members are to be determined by a sitting governor. Instead, Roach has called on the senate to take serious its advice and consent role with regard to Mapp's

nominees.

"These appointments by law require our advice and consent. That is an important and critical responsibility, and it should not be taken lightly," Roach said in a press release issued late Friday.

Roach argues that the Virgin Islands Organic Act requires that the salaries of government officials be paid in accordance with an appropriation bill, a measure which was passed by the 30th Legislature in September of 2014, according to the senator.

"The salaries should be kept at the levels presented then, and on which the FY 2015 budget was premised," he said.

Aside from the law's requirements, Roach said Mapp's move to give raises to cabinet members who've spent less than five months serving in their new capacities -- some in the excess of \$20,000 -- is unaligned with the governor's State of the Territory Address, where he said the islands' [financial condition was on life support](#).

"The salary increases are totally inconsistent with the budgetary nightmare that the Governor presented in his first State of the Territory Address in January of 2015," the senator said. "He basically said that we are on the brink of financial collapse." Roach added that since the territory's financial condition hasn't improved, "we are in no position to afford these raises."

In addition, the senator pointed to concerned government employees who fear their jobs might be taken away or their salaries cut, so the idea of giving cabinet members raises, while employees who've worked within government for decades fret for their jobs, is "totally indefensible at this time," Roach concluded.

Following the landmark "no" vote on Thursday, Mapp, an independent, [moved swiftly to compromise](#) with the Democrats, agreeing to a reduction in the salary increases in turn for the approval of his nominees.

In light of this action, Senate President Neville James told *The Consortium* that at about 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, the dynamics shifted.

"We received a call from the Acting Governor, Osbert Potter, and they forwarded documentation to us speaking of compromise, so we are now processing what they've offered us, and we have not adjourned the session — we stand in recess until the call of the Chair," James said, adding that the session could continue as early as next week.

The understanding, James said, would include one of the senators on the prevailing side to make a motion for reconsideration of the Mapp nominees. He said Democrats made up their minds to stand against the salary increases, because to approve raises during times of economic difficulty would send the wrong message to the territory's residents.