

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Compromise, Mapp Offers To Cap Cabinet Members' Salaries At \$105,000

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp, through a transmittal letter issued to 31st Legislature President Neville James, has offered to reduce and cap the salaries of his cabinet members to \$105,000, following the senate's [rejection of 11 of his nominees](#) on Thursday, according to a press release issued late Saturday by James' office.

In response to the Mapp administration's offer, which James said his colleagues have indicated "is a step in the right direction," the Senate President said he is currently looking at the best date to reconvene Thursday's landmark session.

"This letter is to inform you that I am in receipt of Lt. Governor Osbert Potter's May 21, 2015, correspondence, while acting in your capacity, regarding concessions the administration is willing to make with the Senate body, to open the pathway of reconsideration for the nominations of cabinet members that were rejected during Thursday's legislative session," James wrote.

The Senate President also made mention of the advice and consent law that Sen. Tregenza Roach said [should play a critical role in deciding the appointment of nominees](#), adding that the issues should have been addressed "months ago."

"Let me start by saying I am truly pleased that an effort for compromise has been extended to the first branch of government regarding a majority of the members' concerns with the salaries agreed to between you and eleven (11) of your nominees that were submitted to the Legislature for approval through the 'advise and consent' provision required by law," James added.

He continued: "In the letter, it was duly expressed that the Mapp/Potter administration is willing to cap the salaries of Executive Branch cabinet members at \$105,000. The Legislature membership, while in the midst of considering the remaining items on Thursday's session agenda, were all given a copy of the correspondence of said offer, and as such, rather than adjourn Thursday's session, I decided that a recess was in order to allow for further consideration. The public was also notified, on the record, of the proceedings and that we are currently in recess."

It was not made clear in Saturday's press release whether Senate Democrats agreed to Mapp's \$105,000 salary cap offer. However, James said he "welcomed" the governor's approach, and that he's willing to meet with the territory's leader "to discuss the issue further, in addition to other matters of interest to you at this time."

Mapp raised the annual income of most of his cabinet members by thousands of dollars, with his Finance Commissioner nominee Valdamier Collens receiving \$28,000 more than the former director. The move led to numerous debates on talk radio and among constituents, who argued that the raises were untimely, especially when the territory's economic woes continue to affect growth.

Mapp had defended himself with eloquent expression [last month](#), telling popular talk show host Mario Moorehead on WDHP 1620 A.M., that it was important to increase the salaries because he needed skilled people with exceptional talent to form a cohesive team responsible for reformatting a broken government, and that the salary increases were offset by the terminating of individuals who filled unproductive positions.

"It's really in the context of capacity and efficiency," Mapp began, "somebody being able to do the job that's required to be done and doing it right and getting it right the first time."

The governor made known that in the past two administrations an executive order was written to deal with the issue of compensation for commissioners, adding that it was capped by the John P. de Jongh administration at \$130,000. He also explained a situation where commissioners were brought into the territory by de Jongh and given salaries of \$129,000. However, when these employees relocated to the U.S., locals placed in those same positions were given lower pay.

Even so, the governor attempted to explain his position of salary increases issued to cabinet members, using Collens' situation as an example.

"When you look at the background of the commissioner of finance and his experience and his achievements, and what he was being paid before he came to the commissioner's job at finance in the public sector, he, even at \$125,000, took a salary reduction," Mapp said. "But his skill, ability and input on how we're going to right this ship of the Government of the Virgin Islands from a financial perspective, he is going to be able to help us achieve that success."

The governor added: "And so yes, you can get a builder and a contractor to come in and build for you at a particular cost, but that don't necessarily mean you're going to get the best product. And sometimes in the context of your own families and in running your businesses, you pay people sometimes more than you would pay somebody else because you know at the end of the day you're going to get it right, and you're going to get it done the way it ought to be done and you're not going to have to go back to redo it."