The Virgin Islands Consortium

Vialet Says He's In Support Of $105,000 Cap For Mapp Nominees

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Ernice Gilbert May 26, 2015

ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp's compromise of $105,000 salary cap for his nominees that were voted down by Senate Democrats last Thursday, may well be on its way to approval by the full body if comments from freshman Senator Kurt Vialet are to be believed.

In a recent interview with *VI Consortium*, the senator said the governor's offer, while it could be lower, is a compromise nonetheless, and it was the kind of cooperation Senate Democrats were hoping for.

"[$105,000] is a compromise, we have seen movement and I think that is what we wanted from the onset. We wanted to see movement in terms of the governor taking a serious look at decreasing the salaries, and we've seen that," Vialet said. The senator added that while the ideal result would be to return the salaries to their original totals, "in the field of politics, compromise is always hard," he said.

"I applaud him for changing his position and decreasing the salaries to what was discussed in the letter," the lawmaker added.

Vialet, the top vote-getter during the 2014 General Election, said flat out that he is in support of the compromise, but said he would also be pushing to make sure that rank and file employees -- those who do the day-to-day work of the government's agencies and departments -- also enjoy salary increases. "That's a big push for me," Vialet said, making known it's an agenda he intends to champion as the senate moves towards a multi-year budgeting system suggested by the Office of Management and Budget Director Nellon Bowry during his nomination hearing on Friday, May 16.

Bowry, whose testimony spoke of an economy that is still struggling to recover from the economic recession of 2008, compounded by the closure of the HOVENSA refinery in 2012, called on the senate to create legislation that would see the government moving away from yearly budgeting obligations to a multi-year system.

“The structural adjustments that must be made to eliminate the structural imbalance cannot be accomplished in a one-year planning horizon,” Bowry said. “We cannot fix the underlying imbalance in fiscal year 2016, in 2016. By then it’s too late to do anything but stopgap measures and to borrow more money.”

According to Bowry, for the territory to get a handle on its financial woes, the balancing of 2016’s budget should be laid out in a five-year road map.

“I believe it’s time that we move to a multi-year budgeting plan where the current budget is presented, reviewed and analyzed in the context of a five-year fiscal plan,” he said.

Last Thursday's session was recessed until sometime this week. Vialet said senators will know for sure the date when the hearing will reconvene today.