

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Governor Kenneth Mapp Announces Pay Increases To 1,008 Gov't Employees; Dept. Of Education Not Included

Business / **Published On January 12, 2016 06:17 PM /**

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp on Tuesday morning at Government House here announced that seven government department and agencies -- totaling 1,008 employees -- would receive salary increases as of January 1, 2016. But the governor left out the largest of them all: the Virgin Islands Department of Education, with close to 3,000 classified employees, stating that because DOE is so large, it takes more time to conduct a full assessment.

He did, however, stress that all unionized and non-unionized employees working at government department and agencies would receive salary increases, with those not in today's announcement receiving their raises in the "coming weeks and months."

"As a result of the successful negotiations with ArcLight Capital Partners and the Legislature's ratification of the proposed agreement on December 29, we are pleased to now announce to workers across the territory, unionized and non-unionized, that the lieutenant governor and I will begin to execute our commitment to begin to implement pay increases for government workers," Governor Mapp said. "We said when we campaigned and came into office, that we're not going to hold people's pay increases for a campaign period."

The governor thanked government employees for what he said was hard work that they continue to perform "under very difficult circumstances, and without, in many instances, adequate resources to do their jobs." Mr. Mapp then listed the following government agencies and departments as those that will begin to see increases in their salaries dating back to January 1, 2016: Bureau of Internal Revenue, the Division of Personnel, the Virgin Islands Police Department (to include sworn and civilian personnel), the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, the Virgin Islands Fire Service, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Finance. The total amount of funds equates to \$7.4 million, and will be dispensed in step increases, according to the governor.

"These are the first seven government agencies that we have been able to reconcile and say with some assurance of exactly what is owed, and now we will begin this process of implementing the increases pursuant to those collective bargaining agreements that are enforced and where monies are outstanding," the governor said.

And since the increases are being given by departments, the governor said he is directing his newly-announced Chief Labor Negotiator, Mrs. Natalie Nelson Tang How, to negotiate with the unions and encourage them to enter into a stipulation that would come into alignment with the government's method of paying by departments.

"And so if a member of the master agreement (universal deal to be reached between the GVI and unions on method of salary increase delivery), is not included in that department, they will receive their increase when we get to that department, and all increases will be effected January 1, 2016," said Governor Mapp.

Mr. Mapp also made clear that today's announcement of pay increases is not connected to retroactive pay owed to employees. "We're trying to bring employees current and provide, after almost ten years of no salary increases in some instances -- some facing layoffs because of lack of government revenues, others experiencing up to two years in salary reductions in the amount of 8 percent for each of those years, and the Legislature having restored those 8 percent reductions -- we're now going to advance and payout what is owed under the contractual agreements," he said.

During an exclusive interview with The Consortium last Friday, the territory's leader said he would be announcing increases today, and there was hope that teachers would be among the group. Mr. Mapp did mention his commitment to teachers, however because the department is vast, that announcement would come at a later date. Perhaps, as he

alluded to, "in the coming weeks and months."

Asked by The Consortium how would the administration sustain the salary increases, the governor said there were new sources of revenue coming online, although he didn't identify any, adding that his administration would increase the budget to some degree as well.

"[The pay raises] are sustainable because 1), a number of these raises are going to be shared by federal dollars because some of these will include federal employees. 2), there is some growth of the revenue stream. We are resolving issues of monies that are owed to us. And we believe that we can, to a certain level, allow an increase to the budget of the Virgin Islands without busting the budget."

Mr. Mapp said if the ArcLight \$220 million windfall is handled well, the government could remain stable for three fiscal budgets; an achievement that would lead right into the his fourth year in office.