

The Virgin Islands Consortium

A.F.T. Chides Mapp Administration; Says Teachers Won't Forego Retro Pay

VIC News / **Published On April 08, 2016 10:44 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **April 08, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands chapter of the American Federation of Teachers has issued a statement chiding the Government of the Virgin Islands following Consortium [stories](#) that [revealed](#) the Mapp administration's plan to request that government employees forfeit over \$300 million in retroactive pay the government owes them in order to receive [promised salary increases](#).

Governor Kenneth Mapp told this publication on Tuesday that all government employees were being asked to forego the retroactive monies as a condition to receive the salary increases, and the administration's own "stipulated agreement" attempts to waive retroactive pay -- negotiated with unions in 2010 by then-Office of Collective Bargaining

Chief Negotiator Valdemar A. Hill, Jr. -- for the time period beginning September 11, 2011 to through August 11, 2015. Mr. Hill [told senators last year](#) that he negotiated with local labor unions in 2010, where a plan to raise government employees' salaries as a way to pay the retroactive money was agreed upon. However, the plan was never implemented.

"While the government continues to ignore deplorable, unsafe school conditions, it is also showing deep disrespect for Virgin Islands teachers by reneging on an agreement it made with the St. Croix Federation of Teachers and the St. Thomas-St. John Federation of Teachers to provide teachers with retroactive pay increases," said the presidents in a joint statement.

St. Croix A.F.T. President Rosa Soto-Thomas was more pointed: "It's illegal and insulting for the government to refuse to pay teachers what has been negotiated fairly," she said. "The government's disrespect for public education and its teachers and students seems to know no bounds. Our schools continue to have deplorable conditions, affecting safety, health, teaching and learning."

In the brief interview with The Consortium on Tuesday, the governor was clear in stating that negotiations were ongoing, but he suggested that if employees were willing to hold on to ten-year-old contracts and wanted lump sum payouts, there was not much that he could do.

"It's been ten years that employees of the Virgin Islands Government have seen any increase in their pay, and if you hold on and you say, 'well, I had a contract that's ten years old and I want all my money...'" The governor did not complete his statement; however his expression suggested that such a stance would result in a stalemate and thereby stall progress on the promised salary increases.

Teachers and other government employees have taken to social media and other forums to voice their opinions. Some have suggested staging a territory-wide shutdown of local schools until the matters are resolved. And the St. Croix chapter of A.F.T. has called an emergency meeting for Wednesday, April 13, to be held at the Alfredo Andrews Elementary School to discuss "contract updates" and "other very important union issues."

Feature Image: A collage of AFT union protesters at Government House in Christiansted in December, 2015.

Image Credit: VIC.