

The Virgin Islands Consortium

BMV Director Says All Rank And File Employees Will See Raises By Next Payday; Progress Was Delayed By Apparent Vendetta

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ST. CROIX -- Following a [damning story](#) concerning some \$450,000 that Senator Kurt Violet found out during a Committee on Finance hearing could not be accounted for by the Bureau of Motor Vehicle, monies allocated by the 31st Legislature to be used for rank and file employee raises, Lawrence Olive, B.M.V.'s director, told The Consortium on Tuesday that B.M.V. officials struggled to explain where the monies were because of an apparent vendetta by an employee of the Division of Personnel, whose spouse, a former employee of B.M.V., had been fired and charged criminally. The employee was blocking the monies' release, he said.

And he railed against Mr. Violet, calling the senator's suspicion that the funds were used to raise the salaries of top tier employees "hogwash," and that the senator was using the situation as a political football to lift his reelection campaign. "I will throw egg in his face," Mr. Olive told The Consortium in an earlier phone call on Monday, referring to the freshman senator. "I hope you all can take the heat."

But at least three of B.M.V.'s employees, who Mr. Olive said are "working at the pleasure of the governor," had seen their salaries increase under the guise of title change.

While steering clear of stating that upper management did not get raises, Mr. Olive stressed that those raises were not as high as \$10,000, as Mr. Violet had suggested. He said when he became director, he realized that upper management positions pay "were not conducive to employees in other departments." The director refused to elaborate on what exactly those employees now make, but after a back-and-forth, he revealed the names of at least three employees and their new salaries, who he said were hired by the governor to serve at the chief executive's pleasure.

"Governor Mapp had to approve" in order for those persons to get their jobs, Mr. Olive said. These employees include Asa Victor, who was promoted from financial management officer to chief financial officer, now earning \$65,000 annually. "Governor Mapp had to approve it and sign it in order for her to get the position," Mr. Olive stressed.

An IT director was hired with a salary of \$50,000 annually. Mr. Olive said the position was vacant and is now occupied by an employee named Edline Duwent, who was a systems analyst at the bureau prior to her new position. She too, Mr. Olive underscored, was hired to serve at the pleasure of the governor.

The third person serving at the pleasure of the governor at B.M.V. -- named Brenda Benjamin, according to Mr. Olive -- was formerly employed as a territorial human resource manager, whose job title was also changed to the deputy director of payroll, human resources and labor relations. Ms. Benjamin now makes \$60,000 annually.

"These positions and these salaries were placed before the \$450,000 was given to us for pay raises for the employees at the Bureau," Mr. Olive said. "These positions were not after the money."

He said the \$450,000 that senators are claiming was allocated by the Legislature, was actually a Mapp initiative that they tagged on to. "They're claiming victory for that, but they're not giving the due where it's supposed to go," he said. Mr. Olive's assessment of the matter stands in stark contrast to that of lawmakers, many of whom say they were the ones who actually started including salary increases for employees in the 2016 budgets of various departments and agencies, before Governor Kenneth Mapp introduced his [wider wage increase plan](#).

The director also savaged Mr. Violet, stating that the lawmaker had no right to mention the \$450,000 matter while hosting a [campaign launch event](#). "He's using it for political gain," Mr. Olive said.

Yet, when asked to explain why has it taken a year to make available the monies appropriated for rank and file B.M.V. salary increases, Mr. Olive blamed the problem on a mix-up, stating that, "some of the money did not go for that because Office of

Management and Budget made an error and put it in other accounts, which we had cleared up so that the employees can get their raises. When we realized that the monies went in wrong accounts, we worked along with O.M.B. to clarify and to rectify that problem, which we did."

He said because government works slow, the Notice of Personnel Action (NOPA) documents sent to the Division of Personnel took extremely long to come through.

Asked to expound further on the turtle-like pace of making those increases available, Mr. Olive explained a nefarious situation doused with evil motives.

"I have emails from last year August [when] we sent our documentation in to Personnel, and because one of their employees have a chip on their shoulder for the people of the Bureau; because their spouse worked at the Bureau and was arrested and charged with fraud and went to prison, okay? Our paperwork sat up there for almost five months, until I called Director [Milton] Potter, and notified him about the situation. Within half an hour, our stuff went to O.M.B."

Mr. Olive did not ascertain when the call was placed and its correlation to the salary increases for some 31 rank and file employees that he said would be issued by next payday. But he went on to reassure those employees that their increases would soon be seen, paid for by the \$450,000 allocated in 2015.

"Everything is already in progress. By next pay period every employee of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles will see their raises," he said.

Feature Image: BMV Director Lawrence Olive. (Credit: VI Legislature)