

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Promised 8 Percent Pay Cut Restoration Has Been Eliminated By The Senate's Finance Committee

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp at a press conference held at Government House in December, promised to restore the 8 percent pay cut imposed on government employees during the former Governor John P. de Jongh administration.

Mr. Mapp's promise followed a panel of the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, which [ruled in favor](#) of unionized employees who were represented in a lawsuit brought by the United Steel Workers Union and the American Federation of Teachers.

The restoration was part of the governor's five-year economic growth sin tax plan, and the payments were to be released over the course of two years, according to the

governor -- an amount he estimated to be \$65 million. The salary restoration would go to unionized and non-unionized employees who are both currently employed and no longer with the government.

The appellate court's decision overturned a September 2014 lower court ruling in favor of the government. The ruling gives the unions the opportunity to take the case to an arbitrator. However, Mr. Mapp said in December that he would direct the Attorney General's Office, as well as the Office of Collective Bargaining, to ask the unions to wait on taking any action and allow the G.V.I. to make good on its promise of restoring the 8 percent salary cut. Mr. Mapp said he'd also directed the O.C.B. to halt all negotiations with unions until the matter was resolved.

But with yesterday's removal of the language, Department of Finance Commissioner and Public Finance Authority Director Valdamier Collens said the government no longer had a funding source to make good on its promise.

The move will upset union leaders and government employees who were hoping that they would be repaid.

"We will work together with our members and the other unions involved as we move forward toward a final resolution of this case," said St. Croix Federation of Teachers Soto-Thomas said in December. "We are grateful for the circuit court's recognition that the government must keep the bargains it makes with the teachers, paraprofessionals and school-related personnel who educate our children, and the other workers who provide essential public services to all Virgin Islands residents. The St. Croix Federation of Teachers will pursue reimbursement for the salary withheld."

The Committee on Finance, chaired by Senator Kurt Vialet, voted in favor of sending the bill with language removing the 8 percent pay cut restoration, to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary. Voting in favor were senators Vialet, Neville James, Blyden, Brian Smith and Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly. Voting against the measure were senators Dwayne DeGraff and Tregenza Roach.