

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Financial Crisis: Mapp Says High Salaries Of Local Officials Not Priority

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ST. CROIX -- With the government facing a \$110 million budget deficit and looking for ways to trim its operations, a resident challenged Governor Kenneth Mapp on talk radio on Thursday to consider lowering his salary.

But Mr. Mapp, sounding irritated, told the caller that his salary -- \$150,000 annually -- or that of the lieutenant governor and lawmakers for that matter, were the least of his worries.

While the resident -- who called in to the Mario Moorhead talk show on WDHP 1620 A.M. on Thursday afternoon -- was still expressing herself, Mr. Mapp interrupted her to make

is point.

"Alright, so let's put it in numbers," Mr. Mapp began. "So pay the governor \$50,000, right? So you just saved \$100,000 on my salary. Pay the lieutenant governor \$50,000, you save \$75,000, right? So now you're at \$125,000. And cut each senator [by] \$30,000, so you multiple that times 50 -- you don't have a half a million dollars," Mr. Mapp said. "You could do that and say, 'fine, now we have done something, and now they're getting paid what we think they earn.' What I'm trying to suggest to you is that rather than go through the political hoops to say we're doing something like that, it seems to be symbolic.

"What we're saying to you and the community, is we need to grow, expand our economy -- we need to get the opportunities. We have workers that aren't getting the pay they require for their profession, so they're taking opportunities and leaving and going to other jurisdictions... The constant cry of cut, cut, cut and you're going to solve the problem is not a real solution," Mr. Mapp said.

The resident responded by comparing the salaries of some U.S. governors to that of the territory's. She reminded Mr. Mapp that with just over 100,000 residents in the USVI, he was presiding over a fraction of the people compared to his U.S. mainland counterparts.

"If we're going to compare like you're comparing salaries, governors in the United States, most of them, make under \$100,000 a year," the caller said. Indeed, many mainland governors receive much less than their USVI counterpart.

The governor of Maine, for example, makes \$70,000 annually. Maine's population is 1.33 million, according to 2014 estimates. That's almost ten times as many people as the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Colorado's governor earns an annual salary of \$90,000. The state has a population of 5.356 million people according to 2014 estimates. In fact, Mr. Mapp's salary matches that of the governor of Texas at \$150,000 annually; Texas being the second-largest state by population in the U.S., with a total of 26,448,193 people.

"Why do we have to be so exorbitant [given] our condition?" asked the caller. Mr. Mapp responded by stating, "I came and met it that way." The caller then pressed the governor, stating that if he would lower his salary, "it would be more than symbolic, it would be inspiring."

Mr. Mapp interrupted again and said, "If you guys want to cut the salary, go cut the salary. That's not my discussion. I'm just being candid with you." The governor then explained the expense of getting professionals to work for the government, and pointed to the Department of Health Commissioner, Michelle Davis, who will serve in the territory for two years according to the agreement. Ms. Davis's local salary is \$150,000 annually.

"You could keep singing that song, I'm only suggesting if that's what the community wants to do, it wants to get it done, [then] get it done and that's fine. It's not going to solve any problem," Mr. Mapp said. The caller then challenged the governor to take it upon himself to lower his salary. "It would be very impressive if you did," she said. But the governor fired back, "The community can do it."

He added. "I'm going to be honest and tell you I'm not taking up that initiative. I am more concerned about the better growth, the wider growth of the community, the opportunity for jobs, for investing in the community to get the revenues up to provide the services. But the symbolic cut of cutting two or three hundred thousand dollars out of a \$700 million budget to say, 'okay, we're paying the senators lower, and we're paying the governor and lieutenant governor lower,' and so we've created some massive achievement, for me is not realistic, and I'm just not going to expend my time on it."

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