

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senator Jean Forde Says He Would Not Accept A Pay Cut

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ST. CROIX -- When Senate Democrats decided to host a town hall meeting to hear from constituents following their overwhelming support of Governor Kenneth Mapp's sin tax and property tax bills, which the governor said was needed to help allay the territory's fiscal crisis, it was fair to assume that they expected questions about their own salary, which, at \$85,000, [is more than almost all U.S. state senators](#).

Like clockwork, the question was posed: "My first question, Act 6905. [Is] the 32nd Legislature willing to take a \$10,000 or a \$20,000 cut?" asked Taheema Edwards. Senators Neville James and Myron Jackson said they would take a pay cut if it came across the board, meaning the legislative and administrative branches of government.

But Senator Jean Forde disagreed.

"I will tell you straight up, that if this job was paying \$20,000 less, I would not run for it," Mr. Forde said. "Because 1), I was making more than that -- as a matter of fact, it is a lateral move for me. 2), It's because that my efforts, my energy of what I have put in, that I am giving the money's worth."

By then, the audience had started to mumble, a sign of dissent among constituents.

Mr. Forde continued: "I know this might not be popular to say.... But I'm telling you that I think that I am worth what I'm being paid." The senator said if he'd accepted the current salary of \$85,000 and thought that he was not deserving of it, "then I would be guilty of some degree of fraud. And I have never defrauded this government," he said.

"And this is not a popular position to take," Mr. Forde went on, "but I can tell you that I could not afford to make less than what I'm making." The dissent among residents attending the town hall was palpable, with mumbles turning into outright audible denunciations of Mr. Forde's remarks.

Mr. Forde said his aim was to empower individuals, and pointed to his landmark legislation [of minimum wage increase](#). "I believe in empowering people," Mr. Forde said resolutely, but the audience was in an uproar by then, with the moderator attempting to restore order.

The senator then pivoted, suggesting that the community's call for a reduction in the pay of lawmakers, amounted to teaching the territory's youth that they are not worth high salaries.

"We have got to be very careful as we send our children off to become educated, and we tell our children that 1), Your parents are not even worth the salary that they're making, therefore you simply can't even make that kind of salary," Mr. Forde said, which again provoked the audience's ire. "I am saying that I am worth my salary, and if the salary was less, I'm not going to run for it."

When given the opportunity to respond, a resident rebuked Mr. Forde.

"Most of us in here are not getting paid and haven't been paid -- especially a lot of retirees -- what we are worth, and they still owe retirees back money, retro, that no one talks about," she said.