

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senator Jean Forde Says He Regrets Salary Comment

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Senator Jeane Forde

ST. THOMAS -- Senator Jean Forde on Wednesday issued a statement expressing regret for stating that if he was being paid anything less than \$85,000 annually, that he would not seek reelection because he was making "much more" before becoming a senator.

The comments, laid bare by The Consortium in both [written](#) and [video](#) news reports, set off a firestorm among Virgin Islanders, who received Mr. Forde's comments as offensive and without empathy for residents who have been working government jobs for years, but have yet to receive salaries that match their worth.

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"I will tell you straight up, that if this job was paying \$20,000 less, I would not run for it," Mr. Forde said on Thursday. "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."

Today, however, Mr. Forde did an about-face, stating that he would share in the sacrifices if senators were to take a pay cut.

"In a recent town hall meeting on the island of St. Croix, when I was asked whether I would take a \$20,000 pay cut, I answered immediately and may have given the impression that I am insensitive to our economic plight," Mr. Forde admitted. "This is the furthest thing from the truth and I regret having offended anyone or disappointed anyone with my statement. In fact, I recognize that I am indeed a member of this community and will willingly share all necessary sacrifices that have to be made".

Mr. Forde said that he will remain vigilant in advocating for higher salaries for teachers and will continue to fight for working people and retirees.

"I would like to thank my fellow Virgin Islanders for their continuous support including those who have expressed displeasure with my comments," Mr. Forde added. "This job is one of great responsibility and I am honored to be in the position that I am in. I do not take my job lightly as my decisions and actions affect everyone in our community. Be assured that I will continue to work in the best interest of the people. I thank you."

During the town hall on Thursday, the audience had started to mumble when Mr. Forde revealed his stance on the salary matter, a sign of dissent among constituents.

He 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.

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