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Senators Salary to Increase to \$100,000 in January. Javan James Tried to Stop the Increase, But He Was Shutdown By Colleagues.

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Ernice Gilbert **October 01, 2020**

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**A collage of the senators who voted to remove a bill from Wednesday's agenda on which an amendment would have been added to stop the salary increase of senators
By. VI LEGISLATURE**

Senator Javan James was not having it. He had told the Consortium on Tuesday that the salary of senators was about to increase by \$15,000 each, meaning each senator's pay would grow from \$85,000 to \$100,000, if the law that ties the salaries of senators to the lowest paid commissioner was not amended to remove this stipulation before January. He told the Consortium of his intention to bring the amendment to abolish the clause.

On Wednesday, Mr. James saw his opportunity. Bill No. 33-0198 was supposed to be the non-germane measure where senators tack on all sorts of amendments. It's what the Senate traditionally calls the "Christmas Tree Bill".

But the non-germane [bill](#) — which seeks to discourage the importation of indigenous animals into the territory, which was [thoroughly vetted](#) in two committees of jurisdiction — was suddenly pulled from the agenda by its sponsor, Senator Athneil Thomas, who made a motion to remove it (seconded by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory), contending that the bill needed further changes.

Mr. James objected to the motion. A two-minute debate ensued between Mr. James and Mr. Thomas.

"I am in objection to removing Bill No. 33-0198 from today's agenda. I have had the opportunity to review a lot of amendments that my colleagues offered here today and I think it's in the best interest of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands," Mr. James said, pointing out that many of the senators had some great amendments to tack on to the "Christmas Tree Bill" that would have benefited residents.

"I just want to know why we are removing Bill No. 33-0198 from today's agenda," he asked.

Mr. Thomas said, "It is my bill. I had left out certain sections that would address other indigenous harmful species that are already here and we need to correct that. The amendment is not prepared, and I don't want my bill moving forward without the proper amendments."

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Senator James fired back. He said Bill No. 33-0198 was the non-germane measure that was previously agreed on by senators. He said his amendment, which the senator has held since July 2019, was a controversial one. "So if they choose to remove it from the agenda, I just want the public to know of my intention" of bringing the amendment to stop the salary of senators from increasing.

Voting to remove the non-germane bill from the agenda, which included the amendment that would have stopped the increase of senators' salary from \$85,000 to \$100,000, were: Senators Allison DeGazon, Myron Jackson, Kurt Vialet, Janelle Sarauw, Stedmann Hodge, Novelle Francis, Marvin Blyden, Frett-Gregory, Steven Payne, and Mr. Thomas.

Voting against removing the bill, which included the amendment that would have stopped the increase of senators' salary, were Senators James, Kenneth Gittens, Oakland Benta and Dwayne DeGraff. Senator Alicia Barnes was absent.

The Department of Sports, Parks and Recreation has the lowest paid commissioner in the territory at \$85,000. Currently, this person is Calvert White. Governor Albert Bryan has given Mr. White a salary increase of \$15,000, which is set to take effect in January. As it currently stands, law requires that once the lowest paid commission's salary increases, the salary of senators increases as well. That would be an additional expense of \$450,000 to taxpayers in two years.

Ms. Sarauw told the Consortium that she opposed the amendment because it needed thorough discussion, and because lawmakers should not be left to set their own salaries. Instead, she argued, increasing the salary of senators should be tied to something, for example a referendum.

Senator Kenneth Gittens, however, argued now is not the time for a salary increase. “I cannot support a salary increase for senators at this time given the level of economic uncertainty we face in the territory and I certainly would oppose any increase for senators until such time as we have found a way to address the shortfall at GERS,” he said.

Correction: Oct. 1, 2020

Figures relative to the total amount that would be accumulated by taxpayers by the \$15,000 pay raises were updated for accuracy.

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