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Senators Slam Proposed Legislation to Move Their Retirement Age From 60 to 65

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Alma Francis-Heyliger sponsored the bill that seeks to increase the retirement age of senators. The measure failed after coming under heavy criticism from lawmakers. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Senators on Wednesday blasted a bill that sought to increase the age they would be eligible for retirement compensation from 60 to 65, ultimately refusing to hold a vote on at the controversial measure sponsored by Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger during a Committee on Government Operations and Consumer Protection hearing.

Ms. Francis-Heyliger contended that 65 was the standard age of retirement across many areas of government. “We have to be fair across the board as much as we can, and I find that when it

comes to us as representatives, we have to lead by example. Leading by example for me is being part of the trenches of all those people that have to work up to the age of 65.”

Senator Javan James disagreed with Ms. Francis-Heyliger's "across the board" statement, asking aloud whether the measure would include the other two branches of government. He said that after one term in office, a governor and lieutenant governor collects 40 percent of their pay regardless of age, and that number jumps to 80 percent if a governor is elected for a second term.

Government Employees' Retirement System Administrator Austin Nibbs confirmed Mr. Jame's statement.

“Are we really talking all across the board today? If you’re going to bring legislation, bring legislation that is all across the board if you really want to talk about impact," Mr. James said.

A universal threshold of age 65 should be set, suggested Mr. Nibbs in response to a question from Senator Milton Potter. “It’s my position maybe we should just set a universal rat. We have recommended [age] 65 years ago," he said.

Senator Kurt Violet said the job of a senator cannot be generalized with other areas of government. "To serve in this body you have to run every two years," he explained. "You have to be elected, you're not protected by a union; you're protected by the work you do when you come and report on a daily basis and the measures that you pass. You cannot make the same comparison that a senator is the same as teachers, same as the custodians..."

Mr. Nibbs clarified that even after serving three terms senators must wait until 60 to receive any retirement benefits. “The common perception out there is that you serve your three terms and you get your full \$85,000, which is not correct," Mr. Violet stated.

Senator Novelle Francis said the bill would "eliminate young aspiring individuals from actually joining the Senate." He added, "Let’s stop playing games with the people. Let's focus on us not totally hitting a home run but at least hitting a double base hit so that we can resolve this issue of the insolvency of the G.E.R.S.”

Mr. Nibbs said the measure would have minimal impact on G.E.R.S and its impending insolvency. Ms. Heyliger, however, stated that the bill was not brought forward for financial impact. "This piece of legislation to move from 60 to 65 has everything to do with making sure that the very people that employ us understand that we are here in the trenches with them.”

Motions by Ms. Heyliger to move the bill to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary failed after the motions received no second supporter.