The Virgin Islands Consortium

Premium Pay Focus Now on Private Sector Workers, Bryan Says as He Seeks Patience From Public Sector Employees

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Janeka Simon February 13, 2023

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. wants public sector workers pushing for Premium Pay funds that have not yet been received to be patient, as priority is given to ensuring eligible private sector workers receive their pandemic-era benefit.

Last week, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety was told by Bureau of Corrections Officials that about 100 corrections officers still had not received their checks.

Subsequently, the Consortium learned that at least one nurse at the Juan F Luis Hospital was still awaiting payment. The publication is working to ascertain approximate numbers of nursing staff affected.

“They're gonna get their money. It's not going anywhere,” the governor promised during a press briefing last week. However, he was adamant that those in the private sector who qualified were at the head of the line.

“This was primarily for private sector workers,” Governor Bryan said. “Government employees got paid two and a half years, whether they came to work or not. A lot of our private sector employees didn't. So we prioritize. The people in the community, all them people who were doing cashier and stocking shelves and working in the banks, those people had to come to work. All the government employees, they got paid, all the EMTs, all these other people, they got overtime.”

The Premium Pay program was billed as a means of recognizing those dubbed “essential workers” in the territory. These were people in both the public and private sector, earning annual salaries of $70,000 or less in base pay, who had to be on the job during two lockdown periods in 2020; nurses, corrections officers, cashiers, and shelf-stockers all included.

In his argument for continued patience from public sector workers, the governor also highlighted aspects of their job security that those in the private sector did not enjoy.

“I just printed the government salaries of unionized workers that made over a hundred thousand dollars last year. And it's a long list. All these same employees, we just dedicated $3 billion of future Virgin Islands money to their pension system,” Mr. Bryan said.

“The private sector people didn't get a thing, so forgive me if we prioritize the prior, the people in the private sector who actually paid the taxes to pay the government salaries….All those groups that are complaining, we actually negotiated raises for those people….The health insurance went up, the government paid that too. The private sector employees didn't get any of that,” he continued.

Governor Bryan reminded eligible workers that the anticipated payments were not part of their contracted compensation package. “This is something that we are doing to benefit people. They did not earn it.”