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35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

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Senator Alma Francis Heyliger Denounces Governor and Senate President for Underhanded Compensation Raises Amid Fiscal Crisis

I, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger, strongly denounce the recent implementation of salary raises recommended by the Compensation Commission, embraced by the Governor and tacitly supported by the Senate President, for the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and members of the Legislature. These raises come at a time of fiscal crisis in the U.S. Virgin Islands and were deliberately hidden from myself and, seemingly, from the general public. Such clandestine efforts are not only ill timed but also reflect a serious lack of transparency and accountability.

I was stunned to wake up this morning and learn about these raises through media reports, just like everyone else. As a sitting senator, discovering such significant action from a news article, rather than through official channels, is deeply troubling. This represents yet another example of how a one party system operates without meaningful checks and balances, leaving vital decisions shielded from public scrutiny.

Recent reports indicate that the Commissions recommendations were delivered as early as August 2024 to both the Governor and the Senate President. Yet, to my astonishment, as a member of the Legislature, I was never provided a copy by the Senate President. Had this information reached my desk, I would have emphatically opposed such raises at this juncture and shared the details with the public. While vital government services remain underfunded, programs for our most vulnerable citizens are stretched thin, and no major austerity measures have been enacted to address our mounting financial challenges, moving forward with raises of up to \$192,088 for the Governor and \$95,000 for Senators is a blatant disservice to every hardworking Virgin Islander.

Our community continues to grapple with widespread economic hardships, including limited job opportunities, under resourced healthcare systems, and deteriorating infrastructure, yet those in power have turned their focus inward, awarding themselves higher pay without public consultation or valid justification. According to a recent news article, the public is growing concerned over these unexplained raises. It begs the question: if the Governor and Senate President are content to hide these critical documents and deliberations from a sitting senator, what else might they be hiding from the citizens of

this territory? This is the same Senate President that is slated to be in charge of the Finance Committee in the 36th Legislature.

This secretive approach undermines the values of integrity and accountability that should guide our elected offices. The people of the U.S. Virgin Islands deserve better, leaders who will confront our fiscal crisis head on, propose meaningful reforms, and ensure that any discussion of compensation adjustments is handled openly and honestly, with the needs of our constituents at the forefront.

Moreover, when elected officials campaign for office, they do so knowing the salary that accompanies the job. No one is forced to fill out the paperwork, seek votes, or occupy the post. If they feel entitled to a pay increase, they should first demonstrate superior above and beyond performance, especially amid a financial crisis where every government dollar counts.

Action Items

1. **Release All Relevant Documentation**

Make the full compensation report, along with any supplemental data, publicly available so we can have an honest discussion about our governments priorities.

2. **Reverse the Raises**

Immediately rescind these salary increases. Our territory must focus on addressing the fiscal crisis and the pressing needs of our citizens rather than pursuing personal enrichment at this time.

3. **Demand Transparency and Collaboration**

Require that all major decisions affecting the financial well being of the U.S. Virgin Islands involve robust dialogue among all senators and the public, not just a select few.

A Call to Voters

I implore the public to be vigilant and pay close attention to what is happening in our government. The electorate must remain cautious. Those in power who have no qualms hiding essential information from a fellow senator will not hesitate to hide key facts from the public. Your vote has real consequences. Elect leaders who will genuinely advocate for your best interests rather than their own. Our community cannot afford to turn a blind eye to these actions, nor can we allow self serving politicians to line their pockets at the expense of our struggling economy.

I urge every Virgin Islander to join me in calling out these back room deals and insisting on honest, transparent governance. We cannot properly address our fiscal crisis and pressing government reforms if our leaders prioritize personal enrichment over the peoples well being.

Senator Alma Francis Heyliger