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# Cannabis Advisory Board Nominee Fails To Impress Lawmakers

Lawmakers express concerns over Christopher's vague responses and limited cannabis industry knowledge

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## Jamila Christopher

On Friday, members of the Senate Rules & Judiciary Committee blocked the nomination of Jamila Christopher as the Department of Tourism's representative on the Cannabis Advisory Board.?

"My background in human resources has equipped me with the ability to navigate complex regulatory landscapes, advocate for adequate practices and facilitate shareholder engagement," Ms. Christopher told committee members during her testimony. Those skills, she said, were "directly transferable to the work of the advisory board." Her presence on the board, Ms.

Christopher argued, would ensure that the territory’s cannabis regulator would “take the interests and concerns of the tourism sector into consideration when formulating policies and making decisions regarding the cannabis industry.”

However lawmakers, in large part, were not moved by what they deemed to be Ms. Christopher’s lackluster responses to their questions. Disclosing that she was asked to serve on the board by Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte, Ms. Christopher admitted in response to a question by non-committee member Senator Novelle Francis that her background research on the topic was cursory at best. “I think the only Act that I really read was Act 86,” Ms. Christopher said, most likely referring to Act 8680. “Anyone that I spoke to was pretty much internal to our department, not anyone outside,” she continued, saying that she was not sure whether as a mere nominee, she was authorized to conduct such outreach.

During the short question-and-answer session, more than one lawmaker reminded Ms. Christopher that her appearance before the committee was akin to a job interview. Senator Francis remarked that her vague answers “could be troubling for me” if her nomination reached the main legislative body for a vote, and elicited from her with his questioning an admission that she had no interest in the cannabis industry prior to her nomination for the board.?

Meanwhile, some lawmakers found it difficult to engage with the nominee altogether. “Ms. Christopher, if we can get your full attention please. Seems like you have a distraction, and we would like your full attention,” said committee chair Senator Diana Capeheart, in between questions.

Senator Franklin Johnson, at the beginning of this time, asked Ms. Christopher what plans she had to ensure that cannabis tourism is marketed responsibly to locals as well as international visitors. After being asked to repeat the question, the lawmaker gently requested that Ms. Christopher maintain focus. “I would like your attention, not your phone. I would appreciate that very much.” He repeated his question but once again failed to receive a response. “Can you hear me?” Senator Johnson inquired.

“Yes, I can hear you,” Ms. Christopher responded. “And your question...I’m sorry, can you repeat it?”

Rather than pose the question a third time or attempt any additional questioning, Senator Johnson abandoned his query and yielded the floor back to the chair. A motion by Senator Milton Potter to advance Ms. Christopher’s nomination to the full body failed by 3 no votes to 2 in the affirmative. Two committee members — Senators Kenneth Gittens and Carla Joseph — were absent from Friday’s session.

Following her underwhelming performance and the subsequent vote not to allow her nomination to move forward, Ms. Christopher said that her “nerves were a little bit rattled” by her first time appearance before a Senate body as a board nominee.