

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Coffelt And Canegata Back On The Ballot For Govenor/Lieutenant Governor

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In a surprising turn of events for independent gubernatorial candidate Judge Soraya Diase Coffelt and her Republican running mate John Canegata, the U.S. Third Circuit Court has ruled that the duo are indeed eligible to be on the November, 2014 ballot in an order published on Friday.

A panel of three Judges -- Thomas Vanaskie, Patty Schwartz and D. Michael Fisher, issued an order overturning Chief Judge for the U.S. District of the Virgin Islands Wilma Lewis' July 12th decision that disqualified the candidates, and instead granted Coffelt and Canegata's request for an injunction pending appeal. According to the order, an opinion explaining the court's decision will come soon, however as of writing it had not yet been

issued.

How Did We Get Here?

From the start, Judge Coffelt has had problems with her running mates, as her first pick was not John Canegata, a Republican who's also the State Chair of his party in the Virgin Islands, her first choice. Instead, she picked a local St. Croix businessman. Things quickly fell apart as just as Judge Coffelt issued a press release announcing her running mate and newly-announced running



mate had parted ways.

The Judge decided to press on however, and on May 26th, 2014, Coffelt announced that she had tapped John Canegata as her running mate for the position of lieutenant governor. "It is very appropriate that I announce my running mate John Canegata on Memorial Day," she said, adding that, "John is a veteran who served honorably for our country and islands in the armed forces."

However the joy of announcing a running mate was short-lived yet again for Coffelt, as the VI Election Office rejected the nominating petition for lieutenant governor candidate John Canegata, saying that as a registered Republican he could not legally run a nonpartisan ticket with an independent candidate. Coffelt and Canegata were given three days to resubmit.

The three days had passed with no re-submission from the Coffelt team, as they'd instead decided to challenge the ruling in court -- which they did, and on June 7th, Chief Judge for the U.S. District of the Virgin Islands, Wilma Lewis, issued a temporary restraining order (TRO) blocking the election system from disqualifying the two running mates.

Ruling in the candidates' favor, Judge Lewis said that the court "is unconvinced that the plain language of the statutory provisions upon which defendants rely stand for the propositions that defendants assert as the bases for disqualifying the Coffelt/Canegata team. Specifically, the court is not persuaded that the statutory provisions, as written, forbid a registered member of a political party -- who is not a political party candidate for public office, and thus not the subject of a nomination petition for such office -- from running for such office outside of the primary election process."

The story took a turn against Coffelt and Canegata in Judge Lewis' final ruling, concluding that the Supervisor of Elections should be given difference in interpreting the law when said law is silent or ambiguous.

On July 12th, Judge Lewis denied the stay in order, pending an appeal.

Today it's a different story, and Judge Soraya Diase Coffelt and her running mate John Canegata are back on the ballot, adding even more excitement to this year's already animated election season.

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