

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Christensen On Gay Marriage, The "Chucky" Pardon, "Vindictive" Mapp And More

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Ernice Gilbert **November 12, 2014**



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On Tuesday, October 7, at the Frederiksted dock, I met with Delegate to Congress Donna M. Christensen, who is also a gubernatorial candidate in the upcoming Nov. 4 General Election, to get a feel of her intentions for the territory if she becomes the next governor.

If I'm ever faced with a request for a pardon, I would say, [let's] look at what's required, and make sure that [the] sentence of probation is all completed, that restitution has been made and there's a time certain for which that person has been an outstanding member of the community before a pardon would be given. And probably there's some other criteria that I might want to add in because it's not an easy decision, it's always controversial, so that's where I am.

This would not be my first encounter with the Delegate, as I had the opportunity to interview her on my political talk radio show on [Life Radio](#). It would be, however, our premier conversation out in the open--free, without the four walls of a studio restricting us from the natural beauty of St. Croix. And so in this setting, I thought maybe Christensen would stray from her strict path of making sure her answers are politically correct; however, what I would soon find out was that the stateswoman's experience in politics when it comes to sticking to the script.



Ernice Gilbert interviews Delegate Donna M.

Christensen

Christensen spoke on a wide array of subjects, including the notion that she hasn't done much in her tenure as Delegate to Congress, a position she's held for almost 20 years. The Delegate also tackled the big subjects of gay marriage, the pardoning of "Chucky" Hansen by Governor de Jongh, a stronghold of corruption affecting the community, and why she believes gubernatorial candidate Kenneth Mapp is "vindictive."

Q: *Would you have pardoned Sen. Alicia "Chucky" Hansen?*

Christensen: That's a very difficult question to answer because I don't know all that went into it. I would say that the governor has a right to pardon. I would also say that no governor, including myself, would condone people not paying their taxes. And I think that there should be a strong criteria to determine who gets a pardon. It's very difficult to say what I would have personally done in that situation.

Right now, I'm supporting a commutation for someone; I've worked with former governors on pardons. We pardon people for murder, so a pardon is possible for anyone. I do think that elected officials [and] law enforcement officials who have sworn to uphold the law should be held to a higher standard. So, to answer your question hypothetically, I would abstain from doing that.

If I'm ever faced with a request for a pardon, I would say, [let's] look at what's required, and make sure that [the] sentence of probation is all completed, that restitution has been made and there's a time certain for which that person has been an outstanding member of the community before a pardon would be given. And probably there's some other criteria that I might want to add in because it's not an easy decision; it's always controversial, so that's where I am.

You know, I've seen and know of individuals that got pink slips from the Schneider/Mapp administration and I just found it at the time to be very...vindictive might be the word. But to go out of your way to deliver those pink slips yourself was really uncalled for. The people of the Virgin Islands have lived through some times where politics has been very much involved in [determining] whether or not they get a job or a contract, [but] we're not that way.

Q: Your main opponent has been going really hard at you, and you have been going really hard at him. We hear the negative campaigning about who's "sleeping" on the job and who's "vindictive." Negative campaigning, it works, do you think it's something that's healthy for the community?

Christensen: You know, I have never ran a negative campaign. When VI Restore Hope (an organization that create ads in Donna's favor, and pays for their airing) started running the ads, I told them please pull them. They didn't. I'm not paying for them -- they're paying for [the ads] and there are people who feel very strongly about [Kenneth Mapp's] past and about his history, and would not want to see him as Governor. But my campaign has always been a positive campaign -- as a matter of fact, people wrote some ads for me in the primary campaign and I told them 'I'm not going to run that.'



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I will respond, though, to negative attacks on my record or me personally, and I will point out facts, because we run on our record. Anybody can promise anything, some people can speak better than another person, you know, more eloquent or whatever. But you have to look at a person and you have to look at their history, and how they have performed in the community, what their relationship with the community has been and what they have produced, or what they have not produced.

Now, I'll tell you, one difference is that we won't say anything that's not the truth, whereas my opponent doesn't seem to have that same limitation.

Would I sign [a gay marriage bill into law]? You know, again, I'll answer it almost the same way. Bills should go through a process of community involvement and community opinion; the Legislature should debate it. If it got to my desk, and it was not forcing churches to do something that their faith tells them is wrong, I would likely sign it.

Q: *VI Restore Hope called one of your opponents "vindictive," do you believe that to be true?*

Christensen: You know, I've seen and know of individuals that got pink slips from the Schneider/Mapp administration and I just found it at the time to be very... vindictive, might be the word. But to go out of your way to deliver those pink slips yourself was really uncalled for. The people of the Virgin Islands have lived through some times where politics has been very much involved in [determining] whether or not they get a job or a contract, [but] we're not that way. My running mate ran against me, and yet here we are running together -- and we're a really good team. A very close-working team and we will



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So we're not about vindictiveness, we're not about having politics dictate everything. We don't care whose T-shirt you wore; we will care if you're competent, if you have the experience for the job that you're seeking or for the contract that you're seeking -- that's what's important. What's important is making sure that our people are able to work, and reap the benefits of the economy we intend to build.

Q: I want to go into the same-sex marriage issue. Remember we spoke about that [in our first interview]. Would you still sign it into law?

Christensen: I'm going to uphold the Constitution. And the Supreme Court, I noticed, did not take on any of those cases, leaving it to the States. So, it would be up to the Virgin Islands to make that decision. [But] that bill is going to die; it's never going to come, it's not part of my agenda. I do not intend to introduce a [same-sex marriage] bill in the territory.

But I will defend the right because the people deserve equal protection under the law, and the Supreme Court has said in almost every instance, to deny a same-sex couple the right to marry is denying them equal protection under the law, and therefore is unconstitutional. That's what they've said in some of the previous cases that they have heard. And if the highest court of the land has said that, I'm not going to deny anyone any right. And I will also defend, just as fiercely, the right of churches to follow the tenants of their faith and not be dictated to ever be told that you must perform same-sex marriage -- that's up to the church. That's where a separation between church and state is very, very clear, and some churches will and some churches won't.

Q: We're not going to stay long on this, what I want to know is would you sign it or not?

Christensen: Would I sign it? You know, again, I'll answer it almost the same way. Bills should go through a process of community involvement and community opinion; the Legislature should debate it. If it got to my desk, and it was not forcing churches to do something that their faith tells them is wrong, I would likely sign it.

Many thanks to Delegate Donna Christensen and her running mate, Basil Ottley, for taking time out of their busy schedules to join VI Consortium for this interview. We also would like to thank Strictly the Best for providing Ernice Gilbert's wardrobe.

Special thanks to VI Consortium's Video Editor, Kendall Jones.