

The Virgin Islands Consortium

The Big Interview: Mona Barnes On GERS, Gay Marriage, Healthcare, The Economy And More

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Mona Barnes, the first female State Command Sergeant Major of the Virgin Islands National Guard, and third in the 54 states and territories, wants to be the next governor of the United States Virgin Islands. She contends that a "transformation" is what's needed to move the territory forward, and has used that very tagline throughout her campaign in an effort to convey her message.

But, exactly what Barnes will offer the people of the Virgin Islands is what the *VI Consortium* wanted to know when this reporter interviewed the candidate at the Altona Lagoon in Christiansted, St. Croix. And there, she relayed her vision on GERS, economic stimulation, healthcare, same-sex marriage and more.

The type of leader I'm going to be is the one that recognizes that I don't know everything; but the little that I know, I know well. One, I have vision and we come with a mission, and I have a way of getting people to work for the betterment of others. I gift myself with that.

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Q: *How has the campaign experience been?*

Barnes: Well, the experience, I would tell you, is one that I know I could never experience again. Being part of the political process, it just shows me some good and some bad of our system, and some things that need to be corrected. But for the most part, Dr. Coram and I are having fun. I tell people that I am not one that's going to lose a whole lot of sleep on things that I cannot change.

We've pride ourselves on speaking the truth, our platform is based on honesty, integrity and transparency, and that's what we continue to do.

I've been saying it from the beginning and I'll continue to say it, that I truly believe marriage is between one man and one woman. I hear people [saying] 'everybody has rights,' yes, you have rights, but you ask me, Mona Barnes, Pastor Barnes, gubernatorial candidate Barnes, I truly believe that marriage is between one man and one woman.

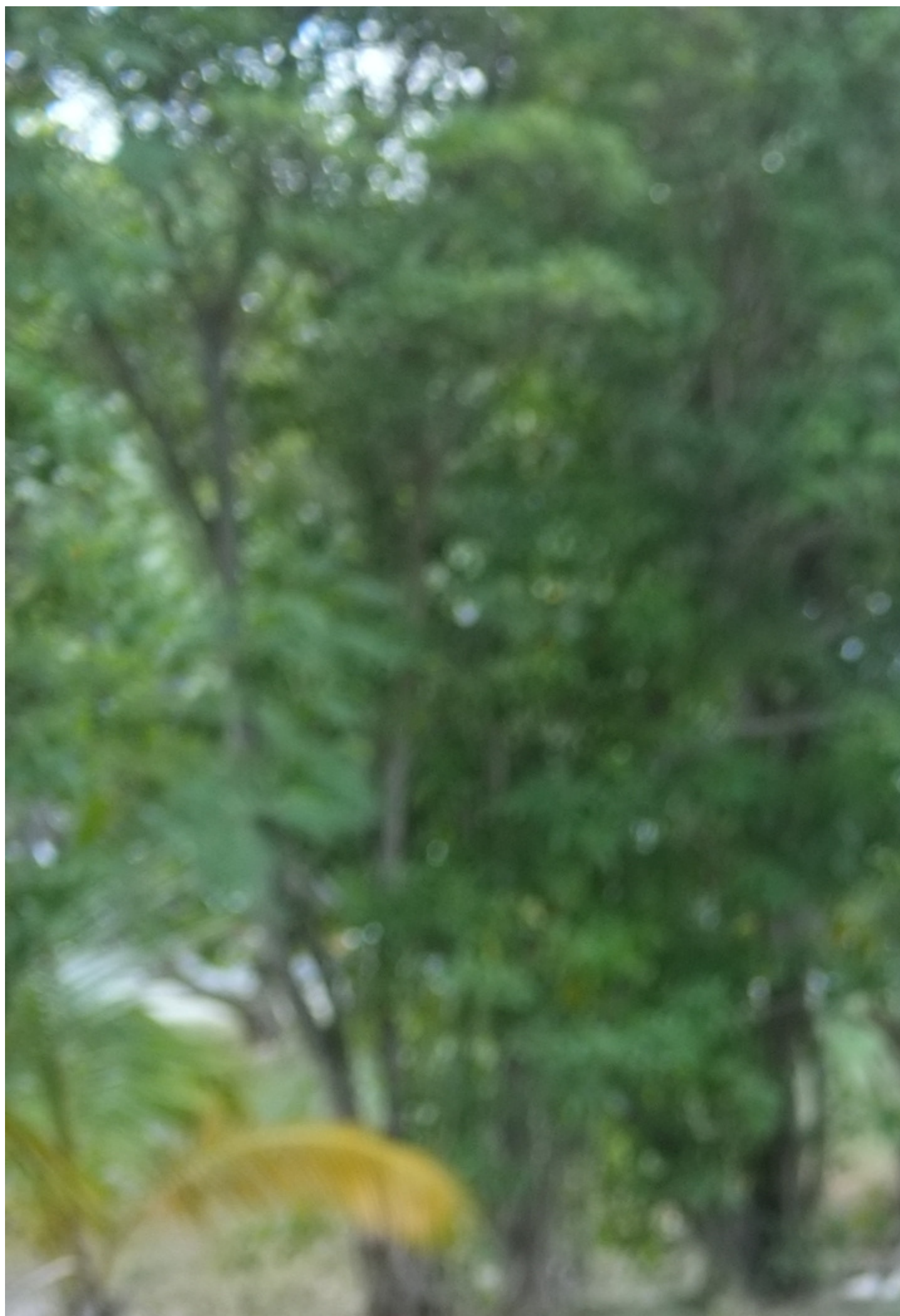
Q: *You talk about the people you hire making a difference. Obviously it starts with you, and I suppose the way you lead, your team will follow. What type of leader do you believe you will be if elected the next Governor?*

Barnes: The type of leader I'm going to be is the one that recognizes that I don't know everything; but the little that I know, I know well. One, I have vision and we come with a mission, and I have a way of getting people to work for the betterment of others. I gift myself with that.







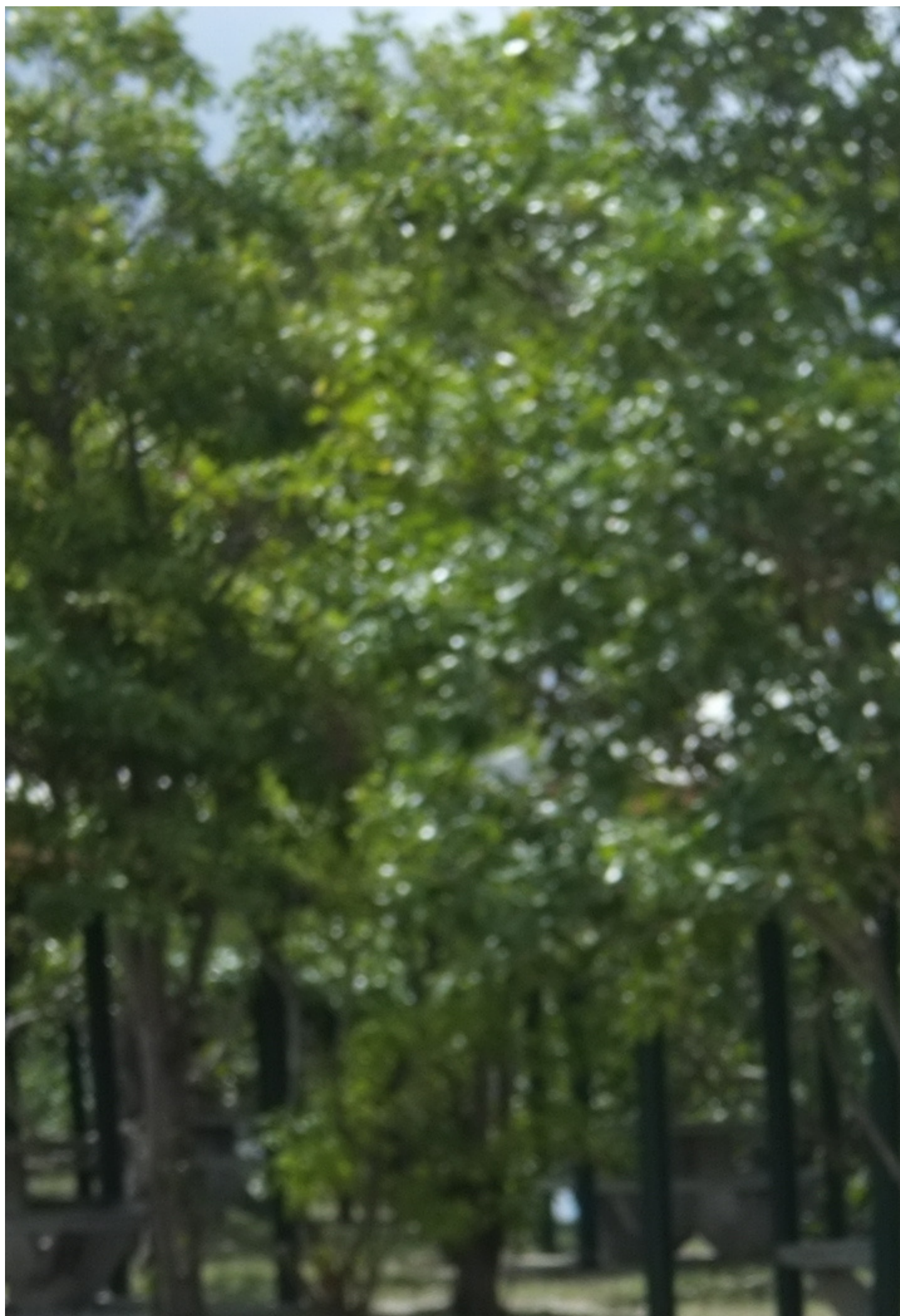




























Being in the military some 27 years, I am a disciplined person, people say no nonsense, but I just believe if we work hard, then we can play hard. I think what's happening presently is, we're playing hard and we're not working hard. So I would tell you that I am a disciplinarian, but I like product and I like production -- not only from human resource, but from any resource.

There are some things in government that need to change, some things need to be automated -- we have to do an overhaul of the way we do government. But I realize that it's going to take more than Dr. Coram and myself to truly make a difference, and I believe that the subject matter experts that we need are right here. And if they're not, then we are going to have to be honest enough and have people come from away.

Q: *What's your stance on the same-sex issue?*

Barnes: I've been saying it from the beginning and I'll continue to say it, that I truly believe marriage is between one man and one woman. I hear people [saying] 'everybody has rights,' yes, you have rights, but you ask me, Mona Barnes, Pastor Barnes, gubernatorial candidate Barnes, I truly believe that marriage is between one man and one woman. And that's the stand that the Barnes-Coram team is going to take, we're not swaying on the issue, we're not making any political conversations about it, we're not trying to water it down -- we believe that marriage is between one man and one woman.

Q: *So let's talk about the economy. We know the main factor right now is WAPA, and of course your administration will deal with that -- any administration would. What else would you do to uplift the economy of the Virgin Islands?*

Barnes: When it comes to economic development, I believe in big business, but I think we need to focus even more on the small businesses of the Virgin Islands. And there are people who want to do business in the Virgin Islands — I sit with them. But we've got to give them some breaks so that they can get started. When I drove past the Industrial Park and I see how many empty buildings they have, and people that are desiring to do small business, light industry, we've got to give them an opportunity.

I think we need to restructure the EDA, where we are more friendly to local small businesses. I understand the intent of EDA, but we now have to recognize that it's the small businesses that's driving our economy.

We need to reconstruct the way that we're doing business in the EDA, and it could be for just a small period of time, but we do have to change it because it's not geared towards the small businesses of the Virgin Islands. And then we have to sit with the banks... I know anything you do in life is a risk. Standing here with you right now, is a risk — you never know what's going to happen, but we've got to take risks and we've got to help the small businesses because they are the ones driving our economy.

Video & Photo Credit: Kendall Jones

At Altona Lagoon, St. Croix