

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Soraya Diase Coffelt Announces Bid For Governor

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ST. CROIX -- Flanked by her two sons, friends and supporters -- including pastors, political people and regular citizens -- Soraya Diase Coffelt announced her bid for governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands at Gertrude's Restaurant here this morning.

Ms. Coffelt was introduced by one of her sons, Zachary Coffelt, and the candidate received a resounding endorsement from her kin, who lauded his mother as a dedicated Virgin Islander who has continuously served the people of the territory in multiple areas. But the most enduring memory of his mother, Mr. Coffelt said, was her dedication to their father, who had fallen ill with Parkinson's disease and later died.

"Today, when I look back on those difficult times for our family, I have no idea how she did it, but she was amazing because she did it all," Mr. Coffelt said. He added, "I know the love and devotion that she has shown me, my brother, my father and the children and youth in the community, she will bring to the office of governor and the people of the Virgin Islands." Mr. Coffelt's wholehearted praise of his mother also served to dispel any perceived contention between the family.

The announcement, attended by the territory's foremost media houses, was the first official campaign launch of any of the potential candidates, suggesting a move by the Coffelt camp to get out early and build momentum.

As for her message, it was clear: to see the Virgin Islands become an economic powerhouse in the Caribbean; put the needs of Virgin Islanders first; and work to restore prosperity. She spoke of helping local businesses rebuild, fighting for families, igniting the tourism industry through diversification and investment, and strengthening the territory's most critical public services.



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And her stance on corruption was unwavering: "We will deal with those who place selfish greed before common good," she charged, adding, "Needless, irresponsible spending will stop. We will spend wisely to achieve our vision."

"I will be a uniter, not a divider. I will bring all segments of our community together. Importantly, I will ask each one of us to undertake our civic duty and volunteer to help our community. The spirit of altruism will pervade the islands because you will have a leader who believes service to the people first and will not only say it, but also do it," Ms. Coffelt went on.

Ms. Coffelt worked to convey a message that would have residents being involved with, not afraid of their government -- playing on the persisting notion that some are afraid to speak out about the ills in government because of the fear of losing their jobs.

"No one in the Virgin Islands should fear our government," she said. "No person or entity should be afraid of speaking out against the political establishment or exposing corruption in the ranks. In a democracy, this should be welcomed."

Running as an Independent, candidate Coffelt said she intends to surround herself with people on either side of the aisle. And in a nod to senators, Ms. Coffelt said she respected the Legislature as a co-equal branch of government, and would work with lawmakers to move the territory forward.

The decision to host the campaign launch announcement on St. Croix, Ms. Coffelt made known, was a pointed move to relay to Crucians that she understands the island's economic plight and intends to work diligently in leading a comeback. "I want to assure you that I will dedicate my time and energies as your governor to do everything I can to bring prosperity to St. Croix," she said.

The announcement was well organized, hinting of a campaign that is serious about winning this go around. Multiple helpers moved back and forth assuring a seamless flow of the announcement, which came on time at 11:05 a.m.

Ms. Coffelt also made available to the press complete kits with information about her campaign. Cameramen captured the entire event and reproduced material to be made available to the press, among them the images included in this article, as well as a forthcoming video.

Ms. Coffelt told reporters that John Canegata would not be her running mate this time, stating that she was registered as an Independent and Mr. Canegata as a Republican. Asked about her 10-day tenure as Attorney General in the current administration, the former judge said she left because she was given a promise by Governor Mapp that she would have the freedom to build her own team, and that she would not be micromanaged, but found a different reality once she took the position.

"Within those short ten days I found out that he would not honor his oath so I stepped away," Ms. Coffelt said.