

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Anne Golden Charged With Fraud, Theft, Money Laundering And Related Charges In 30-Count Indictment; Stephanie Barnes Charged With 4 Counts of Fraud And Related Charges, 2 Forfeiture Allegations

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ST. CROIX -- Anne Golden, the longtime Virgin Islands Casino Control Commission chair, and Stephanie Barnes, a contract worker at the C.C.C., were led into a court room at the District Court on St. Croix by a federal agent around 10:00 a.m. Both wearing black, the women were seated next to their public defender, Attorney Michael Rogers, with Ms. Barnes clearly distraught, and Ms. Golden appearing emotionless at times, and

concerned at some points. Sitting behind them were four family members of Ms. Barnes. On a number of occasions Ms. Barnes turned to her supporters looking sorrowful. "I can't take this," she managed at one point, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Both individuals made their initial appearance before Chief Justice Wilma Lewis today, to face, in Ms. Golden's case, 28 counts of fraud and related charges, and violation of federal and local laws, along with three forfeiture allegations. Ms. Barnes was charged with four counts of fraud and related charges, and violation of local and federal laws, along with two forfeiture allegations.

Charges include theft from programs receiving federal government funds; conspiracy to commit theft from programs receiving government funds; wire fraud; money laundering; forgery; receipt of government property; conversion of government property; fraudulent claims upon the government; and failure to file tax returns. Specifically, Ms. Barnes was charged with making fraudulent claims upon the government; money laundering; receipt of government property; violation of VI Code; and conspiracy to commit theft from funds.



Stephanie Barnes

Bail for both defendants was set at \$200,000, with a \$50,000 security of either cash or property. Both defendants agreed to post bail. They were released today and given 48 hours -- by 5:00 p.m. Friday to come up with the bail amount, or face being remanded back into custody.

Today's was an advisement hearing for both defendants; their arraignment hearing was set for July 25 at the District Court in St. Thomas at 9:00 a.m., with Magistrate Judge Ruth Miller presiding.



Stephanie Barnes hid her face as she left the District Court on St. Croix on Wednesday (July 17, 2019) (Credit: VI Consortium)

Both defendants were given strict rules as conditions of their release on bail. They were to turn in their passports; report any encounter with law enforcement that includes arrest or offenses; they must not communicate with anyone who may be a witness or victim of the case; must not attempt to obtain a passport or any document allowing international travel; must abstain from excessive alcohol consumption; and must not leave St. Croix to travel anywhere except to St. Thomas for the trial. The aforementioned are just a few of the conditions of bail. If any were to be violated, the defendants' bond would be revoked and they could face prosecution on additional offenses.

In a detailed indictment, the federal government alleged that Ms. Golden, as chairperson of the C.C.C., and Ms. Barnes, a contractor, used commission funds for a variety of personal expenditures, including but not limited to trips to Walt Disney World, tickets to a Broadway production of Hamilton, and making a down payment for the purchase of a vehicle. The indictment also alleges that Ms. Golden, who had an annual salary of \$105,000, failed to file timely tax returns for the 2014 – 2017 tax years.

Among the allegations included in the indictment, Ms. Golden spent \$9,931.27 on a Las Vegas trip flying first-class for Ms. Golden and members of her family; \$14,624.20 on a San Juan Puerto Rico trip for Ms. Golden, Ms. Barnes, and Ms. Barnes's son, H.M.; \$5,889.03 on airfare for Ms. Barnes, H.M. and Ms. Golden for an Orlando trip on Dec. 20, 2015; \$19,897.02 on a Miami trip, including expenses; \$3,974.01 for repairs to Ms. Barnes's personal vehicle; \$10,223.58 for lodging at the Ritz-Carlton; \$20,243.35 for Atlanta and Orlando trips for Ms. Golden, H.M. and Ms. Barnes; \$1,098.82 for shopping at Nordstrom's Clothing; \$13,885.59 for travel to Dallas for Ms. Barnes, Ms. Golden and H.M.; \$6,411 in jewelry purchases; and \$5,600 for a private jet flight to St. Kitts for Ms. Barnes, Ms. Golden and H.M., just to list a few.

According to the indictment, Ms. Barnes received more than \$450,000 in commission funds through her contract between 2015-2018. Additionally, Ms. Barnes son, H.M., was not employed with the commission, though his trips with his mother and Ms. Golden were paid for with commission funds, according to the indictment.

See counts in the indictment document below:

[Read the original document](#)

Ms. Golden and Ms. Barnes were arrested on Tuesday by federal investigators. Ms. Golden's woes began to mount following [a damning 2018 Inspector General audit](#) that found out-of-control and questionable spending at the commission by Ms. Golden, whom the audit portrayed as running the operations of the commission as if she were the sole authority, making major financial transactions with no secondary signatory.

The audit lists a myriad of questionable findings. And it found that the Casino Commission was not effectively utilizing its resources to carry out its administrative functions in accordance with established laws, rules and regulations, policies and procedures and best practices.

The day after the I.G.'s audit report was released, then-Attorney General Claude Walker [filed suit in the Superior Court](#) seeking to remove Ms. Golden from her positions at the C.C.C.

In his complaint, Mr. Walker cited Virgin Islands Code Title 32, Section 406 (g), which reads: "A commissioner may be removed from office for misconduct in office, willful neglect of duty, or other conduct evidencing unfitness for this office, or for incompetence. A proceeding for removal may be instituted by the Attorney General in the Superior Court.... Each commissioner or employee of the commission shall be subject to the duty to appear and testify and to removal from his office, position or employment in accordance with the provisions of Title 3, chapter 25 of this Code."

Strengthened by the above section of local law, Mr. Walker charged in his suit that, "Based on recent audit findings, Chairperson Violet Ann Golden must be removed from her position as the chairperson and member of the commission as her actions and/or inaction has shown that she is unfit for office or incompetent."

Then in May, Ms. Golden was [holed up](#) in her office refusing to see Department of Justice investigators who were at the C.C.C. to serve her summons documents.

*Feature Image: Anne Golden leaves the District Court on St. Croix with her brother
(Credit: VI Consortium)*