

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Golden And Barnes Plead Not Guilty To Federal Corruption Charges; Trial Set For September

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ST. THOMAS -- Violet Anne Golden, former chairwoman of the Casino Control Commission, entered a plea of not guilty in federal court Thursday – one week after being arrested on charges she used commission money to fuel a lavish lifestyle of private jets, five-star hotel stays, vacations and jewelry.

Stephanie Barnes, a commission contractor and Ms. Golden's alleged co-conspirator, also entered a not guilty plea during their arraignment before U.S. Magistrate Judge Ruth Miller. Attorneys for Ms. Golden and Ms. Barnes waived the formal reading of the indictment and requested jury trials for both.

Aiming for a speedy trial, Judge Miller set a tentative trial date of September 9. Motions must be filed by August 13<sup>th</sup> and will be heard on September 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Attorneys agreed the scope and complexity of the case might require the trial date be pushed back. Assistant U.S. Attorney Nathan Brooks said the discovery phase has already generated more than 17,000 pages of financial records and electronic files. "It is a fairly complex matter," Mr. Brooks said.

A grand jury handed down the 30-count indictment against Golden and Barnes July 17, alleging the pair conspired to steal hundreds of thousands of dollars in commission funds, converting the money to their own personal use. Among other alleged crimes, they are charged with money laundering, conspiracy and theft of federal program money.

According to the indictment, Ms. Golden and Ms. Barnes used commission money 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. Their publicly funded, lavish lifestyle allegedly included travel to a St. Kitts music festival aboard a private jet, stays at a posh Ritz-Carlton hotel in New York and thousands of dollars worth of jewelry and clothing from high-end retailers.

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.

### **Bail for Golden Still at Issue**

Whether Ms. Golden can meet the requirements to remain free until trial remains an open question. She had until Thursday to post a \$200,000 bond, secured with \$50,000 cash or property.

Ms. Golden intends to secure bond using a property at 150 Estate Solitude on St. Croix. She handed over the deed to the property, which is valued at \$51,000, according to Ms. Golden.

But the deed is not enough, Judge Miller said.

"It's not sufficient to meet the court's needs," Judge Miller said. "The requirement of posting bond has not been completed."

Judge Miller said Ms. Golden had also submitted financial information suggesting the property is worth less than \$51,000. "There is some concern this is not sufficient bond," the judge said to Ms. Golden.

Ms. Golden has to provide an appraisal verifying the value of the property. Evidence that there are no encumbrances – liens, mortgages, etc. – is also needed, Judge Miller said.

David Cattie, Ms. Golden's attorney, told Judge Miller additional records would be provided promptly.

Ms. Golden remained free as of Thursday.

**Correction: July 26, 2019**

*Because of a text error, a wrong indictment date was written. We've updated the story to include the correct information.*

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