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Gov't House Deputy Communications Director Arrested for Drunk Driving; Vehicle Hit Included Occupant Injured by Glass Debris

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Ernice Gilbert **May 10, 2021**

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Gov't House Deputy Communications Director Gerry Yandel By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT

Gerry Yandel, Gov't House deputy communications director and former executive editor of the V.I. Daily News, was arrested on St. Thomas April 25 for driving under the influence of alcohol following a vehicular accident the same day.

Mr. Yandel, who appeared in court on May 7, had his driving privileges suspended by Superior Court Judge Henry Carr III.

Government House Communications Director Richard Motta, under whom Mr. Yandel serves, told the Consortium, "I am aware of the incident involving Mr. Yandel. He is currently dealing with the legal ramifications of the incident to which he was involved." Asked if disciplinary action would be taken, Mr. Motta said he could not discuss personnel matters.

According to an affidavit of the incident obtained by the Consortium, on April 25 at about 1:51 p.m., officers were dispatched to Agnes Fancy in the area of the former Driftwood Inn to respond to an auto collision.

Once on the scene, contact was made with the driver of a 2008 Jeep Compass, who told police he was driving up the hill when he observed a vehicle — a 2019 gray Ford EcoSport — coming downhill towards him at a high rate of speed in the middle of the road, according to the affidavit. The daughter of the man operating the 2008 Jeep Compass was in the passenger's side and she corroborated the information relayed to police by her father. She also said she was injured by glass debris in her face when the mirror of the incoming vehicle struck her father's Jeep. The passenger, who also complained of back pain, was transported on private vehicle to the Schneider Regional Medical Center for care.

A third witness told police that he saw when Mr. Yandel's Ford EcoSport collided into the 2008 Jeep Compass.

Mr. Yandel, who admitted that he was at fault, told police on the scene that he tried to pull as far left as possible, but that there was a ditch in the road.

Police Officer Kyle Francis said he smelled "a strong odor of alcohol emanating from" Mr. Yandel's "person and breath, and his eyes were also bloodshot red and watery."

Officer Francis then advised Mr. Yandel that he would be detained to the Traffic Investigation Bureau for further investigation. Mr. Yandel was further advised that because of the slopped characteristics of the roadway, he would be transported to the bureau where a standardized field sobriety test would be performed.

Mr. Yandel failed the various processes of the field test, according to the affidavit. He failed to remain standing in the instructed position and started too soon; he was swaying from side to side; he failed to keep his arms at his side as instructed; he missed heel to toe on the third, fourth and sixth steps; he also made an impromptu turn, according to the affidavit.

During the one leg stand test, Mr. Yandel raised his right leg but immediately placed it back down and "almost fell over" at one point; Mr. Yandel also failed to keep his arms to his side and swayed from side to side, said the affidavit.

Mr. Yandel, though warned that refusing to provide a urine or breathe sample would result in evidence that may be used against him along with the suspension of his driver's license, refused nonetheless, which was one of the reasons Judge Carr suspended his driving privileges. He was placed under arrest with bail set at \$1,000, which he posted.

Mr. Yandel was previously arrested for D.U.I. in Atlanta in 1991. Under USVI law, a person convicted of DUI the first time is misdemeanor, but a second DUI conviction is a felony with up to 10 years imprisonment. If the government decides to proceed with the case, the government will file a criminal information with a number of DUI-related charges, and Mr. Yandel will then be arraigned. Thereafter a trial date will be set. The government may choose not to file charges against Mr. Yandel and elect a nolle prosequi, or statement of no prosecution.

Katheryn Wenger, a law clerk who was arrested for DUI in St. Thomas and sentenced in June 2020 to 10 months in prison by [Judge Renee Gumbs-Carty](#), was a first-time offender for DUI. She had never been previously arrested and was leaving a party after celebrating the conclusion of her clerkship at the U.S. Attorney's Office in St. Thomas when the DUI incident occurred. She was recently released on [parole](#).

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