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\$1,700 Per Person Per Hour Training, \$5,000 Broadway Show Tickets, \$22,000 Disney Trip: Prosecution Outlines Allegations Against Stephanie Barnes

Government / **Published On December 09, 2021 05:49 AM /**

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Aerial view of the District Court on St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The federal government in its opening statement Wednesday said that evidence will show Stephanie Barnes was a willing partner with former V.I. Casino Control Commission chairperson Violet Anne Golden in a conspiracy to steal both local and federal money, as well as filing a false tax return in violation of Virgin Islands law. Ms. Golden was [recently released from prison](#) after serving time for theft of government funds and failing to file an income tax return.

In opening remarks, Asst. U.S. Attorney Jill Koster said Ms. Barnes "knew what was in [Ms. Golden's] wallet," referring to the hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayer money that was

said to be expended during the time of the alleged crimes.

Ms. Barnes's attorney, Martial Webster, stated his case as well, calling the government's charges "propaganda," and stating that the Office of the Inspector General's [audit](#) of the V.I.C.C.C. read more like a soap opera. Additionally, Mr. Webster said the federal government falsely alleged that Ms. Barnes and Ms. Golden were in a lesbian relationship.

Ms. Koster stated that while the federal government only needs to show that \$5,000 was stolen to launch an investigation, "this is not going to be a close call." She said evidence will show that much more money was stolen.

District Court Chief Justice Robert Molloy, who is presiding over the case, reminded the jurors that the opening statements from the prosecution and defense should not be taken as evidence, a reminder the judge provided following multiple objections by the defense — which he overruled — during the government's opening remarks.

Attorney Koster said evidence will show that a total of \$568,104 went to Ms. Barnes, including more than \$113,000 in perks, vehicle and travel expenses. Evidence will also show, the prosecution said, that Ms. Barnes was given a \$65,000 contract from April to June 2015 by Ms. Golden, however what, exactly, the contract was for remains unclear.



After the contract was signed, Ms. Barnes and Ms. Golden went to the St. Kitts Music Festival from June 24 to July 4th "at the expense of the C.C.C. and the people of the Virgin Islands," Ms. Koster alleged. She said law precludes government employees from flying first class on the government's money, nor can they stay at hotels that charge prices higher than market averages.

The prosecution said, and the defense later confirmed, that Ms. Barnes was paid \$1,700 per person to teach C.C.C. employees about sexual harassment and gambling addiction. The prosecution said that the training lasted for one hour, while the defense argued it was for up to four hours. Additionally, her PhD was paid for by the C.C.C. and totaled over \$44,000. "She is Dr. Barnes because the people of the Virgin Islands paid for her degree," Ms. Koster said.

Additional allegations include a \$900 New Year's Eve dinner at Disney in Florida, a trip that cost the people of the Virgin Islands \$22,158 and included Ms. Barnes's son; stays at five-star hotels for the St. Kitts Music Festival with V.I.P. tickets costing \$1,000, among other trips.

The C.C.C.'s credit card with Ms. Golden's name also footed the bill for a Broadway in New York show that cost \$5,000 per ticket. Ms. Golden and Ms. Barnes were picked up by a limousine to go to the show, although they had a rented car parked at the hotel they stayed in, according to Ms. Koster. The defense argued that it was an SUV that picked them up.

The prosecution said the abuse of government funds happened because Ms. Golden consolidated power and was the only one at the C.C.C. who managed electronic transfers. "Ms. Golden never ceded control of the purse strings of the C.C.C.," said the prosecution. And Ms. Barnes was not the only person to benefit from the abuse of government funds, as "numerous other people received stuff that they shouldn't have, but Ms. Barnes was the primary beneficiary," said Attorney Koster, allegations she said evidence will show to be true.

In his opening remarks, Attorney Webster came out swinging, stating vehemently that Ms. Barnes "never stole any money, taken any money.... from the Casino Control Commission." Instead, Mr. Webster pinned the blame on Ms. Golden, who he said had money problems and had maxed out twelve credit cards. He said contrary to what the prosecution said, Ms. Barnes did not know what was in Ms. Golden's wallet, an assertion appearing to support the defense's narrative that while Ms. Barnes traveled a number of times with Ms. Golden and partook in many activities together, she did not know that it was the C.C.C.'s money being spent.

"Anne Golden is not on trial; her conduct is not on trial," Mr. Webster reminded, trying to distance his client from Ms. Golden, who pleaded guilty to theft of government money and failing to file a tax return — crimes for which she served two years in prison.

Relative to money provided to Ms. Barnes from Ms. Golden that belonged to the C.C.C., including car repairs that the prosecution alleged totaled \$7,000, Mr. Webster said on numerous occasions that Ms. Barnes would always repay the funds to Ms. Golden in cash. Among other cash reimbursements was a charter flight to the St. Kitts Music Festival, he said.

The defense said Ms. Golden was generous with the C.C.C.'s money, adding that "no one challenged Anne." And he said while Ms. Barnes and Ms. Golden lived together for a while, the accusation from the federal government that they were in a lesbian relationship was not true.

The trial continues today.

