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As Decision on Payne's Future in Senate Approaches, Senator Takes to Radio in First Interview to Deny Allegations

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Senator Steven Payne, Sr. By. THE V.I. LEGISLATURE

Senator Steven Payne Sr. has taken to the airwaves to deny claims of sexual assault and sexual harassment made against him by multiple women, just days before the Senate Committee on Ethical Conduct releases its findings, and before the Senate meets in session Wednesday to determine his fate.

On the afternoon of Friday, May 27th, the Office of Senator Stephen Payne issued two press releases, both discussing the three women who have made allegations of sexual harassment and assault against him.

In those statements the Senator, who is currently awaiting a determination from the Committee on Ethical Conduct on their investigation sparked by a complaint from one of his office staffers, seemed to indirectly chide the women who approached Consortium journalists to tell their stories of abuse at the senator's hands, suggesting that a court of law would be a more appropriate forum to air such claims.

However on Thursday, the senator ignored his own advice and took to the public airwaves to suggest that at least one of three women was leveling false allegations against him. Payne spoke on the St. Croix station Papilove radio.

“Secondly, Ms. Jones also admitted during the investigation that she had absolutely no idea what beach on St. John this fantastic imagined —unclear — occurred. Whether a beach in Coral Bay, East End...Maho Bay, Trunk Bay or Cruz Bay. Thirdly, a female employee of Julius Sprauve School where I worked at, warned her about me. Well, the female employee gave me a notarized sworn letter and said give this to your attorney. The letter stated that she never told Ms. Jones anything about me, and she has never received or ever heard of a negative report being made about me while I worked at the school. Ms. Jones also said that I was a father figure to her. People, listen carefully: I met Ms. Jones when she was either 19 or 20 years old. Up until that point, I had ever seen or heard about Ms. Jones one day in my life.”

The senator continued in that vein for some time, referring to Chezni Jones by her last name, ascribing statements and claims to her that he went on to rebut.

As the publication which reported on Jones' 2018 allegations after she reasserted them this year, following initial reports of the woman in Payne's office who accused him of sexual harassment, the VIC Video News desk approached Jones once again for clarity. Although she declined to be interviewed again by the newsdesk, saying that the resurfacing of the allegations has affected her mental health, Jones said that Payne's narrative on Friday was filled with “flaws and lies”.

In a brief series of text messages, Jones admitted that she could not say with 100 percent certainty whether the sexual assault she alleged took place one day in late 2005 or early 2006, occurred on Hawksnest Beach or Trunk Bay. However, she says the claim that she had “no idea” where the incident occurred is a misrepresentation of the truth. “I could tell you for a fact it wasn't anywhere near Coral Bay”, Jones messaged our journalists.

The young woman also disclosed new details of how she and the then-VIPD officer met and knew each other. Jones said that she met him at the age of 21, after her return from college in Florida. Apart from their difference in age, Jones says she viewed him as a parental figure because at the time, Payne was married to someone Jones says she'd known, looked up to, and respected since she was a child. Her trust transferred to Payne, she says - until she realized his motives were less than honorable.

When it comes to the woman who the senator says gave a notarized letter for his lawyer, Jones seemed puzzled when we questioned her about this. “I never gave the name of the woman who warned me about him at the school,” Jones said.

On Thursday, Payne also seemed to be seeking to cast doubt on the claims of 21-year old Steffi Emilien, his third accuser. Days after our reporting on Jones's allegations were published, the Video Newsdesk was contacted by Emilien, who in a tearful interview alleged that the now-senator assaulted her at least three times while she was under the age of 18. In his remarks on the radio, Payne drew reference to a woman who'd concocted a false public narrative in an attempt to cover up a heinous crime.

“People said they believed her simply because she cried. They believed her so much that a drawing of the suspect was broadcast, and several men were questioned by police. Parents warned their children to stay away from black men. She repeatedly cried on television for 9 days until it was revealed that she drowned her sons. “

The senator’s public comments come days before the Senate’s Committee on Ethical Conduct is expected to wrap up its investigation of him and report its findings and recommendations. That was confirmed by a well-placed source to be scheduled for sometime July 20th, this coming Wednesday — the same day of a scheduled Senate session and where Payne's fate will be decided.

As our newsdesk has done since these bombshell allegations came to light, we have tried multiple times, using multiple methods to reach Senator Payne for comment, but we have been unable to do so as of press time.

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