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Payne Allegedly Told Female Staffer to 'Get Comfortable' on his Hotel Room Bed, Displayed Handgun and Made Unwanted Sexual Gestures, as Shaken Woman Sought an Exit, Investigation Finds

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Janeke Simon **July 21, 2022**

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Senator Steven Payne Sr. on Wed. July 20, 2022 was expelled from the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. By. THE V.I. LEGISLATURE

The full allegations of the female staffer in Steven Payne Sr.'s former Senate office which sparked the investigation by the Senate Committee on Ethical Conduct have never been aired in public until Thursday, when the Senate body met to consider the Ethics Committee's findings.

A resolution introduced in the Senate to sanction Mr. Payne [outlined the young woman's allegations against him](#), painting a picture of a predatory, threatening man who used the power and influence he had over his female employee to objectify and degrade her.

According to the staffer, she and the senator were on St. Croix on February 28th to facilitate his attendance at a meeting of the Committee on Homelands Security, Justice and Public Safety, which he chaired. After the meeting, while driving himself and his employee in an official Legislature vehicle to the King's Alley Hotel on St. Croix, Payne allegedly suggested to the woman that they save the Senate money by sharing a hotel room. The staffer said she was made to feel uncomfortable by the unwelcome comment, and felt even more uncomfortable when, over her objections, the senator allegedly commandeered her bags and took them to his assigned room. This, the woman said, forced her to follow him inside in an attempt to retrieve her luggage.

The motion before the Senate on Thursday argued that this alleged sequence of events “amounted to intimidating the female employee to enter Respondent’s hotel room,” behavior Payne’s former Senate colleagues said brought disgrace upon the Legislature.

That disgrace, the motion details, did not stop there. Once the two were inside the hotel room, Payne is alleged to have continued his unwelcome attempts at getting his office staffer to share his personal space. He is said to have commented on which side of the bed was hers, allegedly telling her to “get comfortable.” Even as the woman was able to gather her things and open the door to leave, Payne is reported to have pressed his room key into her hand as a final unwanted parting gift.

Senators felt the comments made to the woman inside the hotel room met the standard of “unwelcome comments of a sexual nature,” and thus violated the Legislature’s stated zero tolerance policy against sexual harassment.

Allegedly compounding the sexual comments was behavior that left the employee feeling intimidated and threatened. Payne is reported to have, at some point in the hotel room encounter, removed his handgun from a hidden place and then proceeded to execute a maneuver known as “clearing the room”, usually performed by military or paramilitary forces when they enter an indoor location within which one or more unknown threats might be lurking. Mr. Payne's displaying of the handgun caused the already shaken employee to feel even more threatened and intimidated, according to the Ethic Committee's findings.

Taken altogether, the motion argues, Payne’s conduct violated his oath of office as a senator, violated the Legislature’s zero-tolerance policy against sexual harassment, violated rule 801 which required him to conduct himself in a manner that reflects respectfully on the Legislature, and violated rule 811 a) which required him to conduct himself with dignity and respect for the high office of senator.

For the aforementioned violations, the Committee on Ethical Conduct recommended suspending Payne for 50 days, but the full Senate body considered and accepted an amendment to the motion which instead [expelled him completely from the Legislature](#).