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Gov't House Offers Fired Exempt Employee Chance to Appeal: Cranston Says She Was Terminated After Having Lunch With Senator Sarauw

Politics / **Published On August 29, 2022 06:14 AM /**

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Danielle Cranston being interviewed by Consortium Publisher Ernice Gilbert on Sunday, Aug. 28, 2022. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

What happens when someone related by family to the highest office-holder in the land goes to lunch with a childhood friend?

If that friend is Janelle Sauraw, sitting senator and current candidate for lieutenant governor, running on a ticket that makes her and your current boss adversaries, then you get fired.

That's the reason Danielle Cranston says she got slapped with a [termination letter](#) on Friday, quickly followed by what she alleges is a smear campaign of false allegations drummed up in an

attempt to justify her dismissal.

Cranston's tenure at the V.I. Police Department, Office of Highway Safety began after a long career of public service, with over a decade combined working for the Water & Power Authority and with the local Department of Justice. About two years ago, while still at DOJ, she received a call from Avery Lewis, St. Thomas' administrator. Also on the call were Jason Charles and Governor Albert Bryan.

"We had a conversation and you know they told me basically that they wanted me to become part of the team and I said yes."

Cranston described her willingness to lend her efforts to the success of the administration because she felt drawn to what she believed Bryan represented to the territory.

"The governor always prided himself in young individuals staying in the territory, coming back home to the territory. And that message that he drove home on the outset of his campaign really permeated the territory, because everybody felt safe. Everybody felt secure, that this was something new. It was a breath of fresh air for the territory. And so you wanted to work for him, you wanted to be part of the team - a solution team."

After some time of unsuccessfully trying to make arrangements, Cranston says she finally connected with another acquaintance in her social network — Carl Knight, Governor Albert Bryan's Chief of Staff. He asked her to submit her resume, and matched her with a position suited to her skills and experience — VIPD Law Enforcement Liaison to the Office of Highway Safety.

Despite openly admitting that she was assisted by Bryan's team in acquiring the exempt position at the VIPD, Cranston rejected the argument that she was placed in a role beyond her professional capabilities.

"It's not that I had to hide behind a political connection, you know? I'm educated, I'm knowledgeable, I'm competent," she said.

Cranston described her job role as liaison between the Virgin Islands Police Department, the Office of Highway Safety, and other transportation-related entities as having "found her niche." In an exclusive Sunday morning interview with Consortium publisher Ernice Gilbert, Cranston wistfully recounted her last project at the agency — starting the process of seeking a grant in support of the Complete Streets Program, a federal program championed by Governor Bryan.

Cranston was happy in her job, she says, and early last week, Cranston said her childhood friend, Senator Sauraw, suggested they meet up for lunch.

"My friendship with her is not a secret. If you know me, you know her. We have a lot of the same friendship circles, my daughter is a moko jumbie because of her...my daughter is her god-child," Cranston told Gilbert.

The friends, VIPD exempt employee and Senator on the gubernatorial campaign trail, decided to go to a local eatery on Wednesday, August 24th. There, Cranston said she met Jason Charles, Governor Albert Bryan's longtime close associate and business partner. In 2015, the pair co-founded professional recruiting firm Master Strategies USVI, along with Claudette Olive. Charles is now head of community outreach with Southland Gaming, which [was recently granted 20 years of monopoly rights](#) on video lottery terminals on St. Thomas.

Charles, Cranston said, was at the restaurant with another man whom she did not know. The two groups — Cranston and Sauraw and Charles and the unknown man — greeted each other and took their respective seats.

The restaurant, Cranston said, did not have her preferred menu item available, and so she and Sauraw left to have lunch somewhere else, and then Cranston said she returned to work to finish up her day.

The following day, Cranston said she called out of work because she wasn't feeling well. At some point on Friday afternoon, she was approached by head of Office of Highway Safety's Human Resources Department Dwayne Richards, who handed her a letter and asked her to sign for it.

At first she says she was relieved when she peeked inside the envelope to realize the document inside was not a pink slip, but that relief quickly turned into disbelief when she scrutinized the paperwork she'd been given.

"When I read it, I was taken aback," Cranston said of the missive informing her that she'd been terminated from her position as law enforcement liaison of the office of Highway Safety, effective immediately. "I read it to the point that I read termination and I was seeing promotion."

Richards, Cranston disclosed, told her that he did not have a part to play in the developments — he was just "instructed" to deliver the letter. Cranston's boss, out on leave, was surprised by the news when her now-former employee called to inform her that she'd just lost her job, and Cranston said that a senior member of leadership at OHS also disclosed to her that management was also in the dark about her swift and sudden termination. "This is new to us too," Cranston recounted the unnamed manager telling her.

The job she says was her "niche", was gone.

The worst part about the shock termination, a tearful Cranston told Gilbert, is that she had no recourse. They didn't even give me an opportunity to speak!" After receiving the discombobulating news that she had basically been fired effective immediately, Cranston attempted to reach out to who she had described as close acquaintances akin to family. "I tried to call, they didn't even answer," she says of Bryan, Knight and others in the administration.

The only person who reached out, Cranston alleged, was Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach. He didn't seem to be aware of the details surrounding her dismissal.

"He said to me Danielle what's going on? And I said I don't know, you tell me! I said Tregenza the only thing this could be is because Jason saw me having lunch with Janelle. That's it! My work speaks for itself," a visibly upset Cranston declared to Consortium cameras.

The now jobless woman excoriated Governor Bryan for what she says is a complete about-face compared with his promises to run an administration free of political retribution, where your employment depends on toeing a partisan line.

"The governor ran his campaign on not doing these kinds of things," Cranston challenged. "And you're going to tell me you consider me family? Impossible!"

"These people have no scruples, none!" Cranston continued. "And I looked at them in a different light because I thought they were different. And not even a phone call, not even a text message to right this wrong — because I had lunch with a friend. A friend who even pre-dated your

administration!”

Adding insult to injury, Cranston said, is that she and Sarauw “didn’t even talk politics” during last week’s lunch date.

Cranston says that allegations that have swirled since her dismissal, that she was involved in the leak of sensitive information that was then used in an attack ad against the Bryan/Roach administration, are ludicrous. Her time at WAPA and DOJ, she says, involved access to highly confidential information connected with controversial topics, and for over a decade, she has never unduly disclosed sensitive information to anyone. Further, Cranston insisted that the information she is alleged to have improperly disclosed is not information she would have been privy to in her former role at the Office of Highway Safety.

Besides, Cranston argued, what value would there have been in disclosing something that is already a widely-held understanding by the public in the first place?

“When I was told about this group [TSG] I said this is the company — they been getting contracts. Why I have to leak that for, that’s known in the territory, that this group gets everything. Why you say that I leak it?”

Cranston also rebutted suggestions that she had been participating in campaign activities for her childhood friend. One event tied to the campaign that she did attend was also host to people from across the political spectrum.

“Everybody and anybody was there. You had people wearing Bryan/Roach shirts that were there, buying drinks and buying food. That’s not support? I didn’t even stay for the whole event”.

Allegations of her attending other campaign activities, Cranston said, are false. Even if she had been showing quiet support to her long-time friend, Cranston challenged the notion that those actions would be legitimate grounds for a summary dismissal with no opportunity to plead her case.

“We live in a Democratic society. The essence of democracy is freedom. You can’t take that ‘way from me. You can’t speak from one side of your mouth and say that you are the governor that’s not going to fire anybody for ties....And if you’re going to campaign on that principle, you should follow through. If you’re going to be transparent, you should follow through.”

Even despite her longtime friendship with Sarauw, Cranston insisted that she threw her electoral support behind her former boss, Governor Albert Bryan.

“When I go to the polls, when I went to the primary, I am secure in my decision because at the end of the day, I know where my bread is buttered.”

Cranston does not know who gave the order that she be fired. Consortium journalists reached out to the Governor’s Office prior to the Sunday morning interview, but were told that Government House makes it a policy not to comment on personnel matters and thus none would be forthcoming. However following our outreach, and just ahead of her testimony before Consortium cameras, Cranston disclosed that unnamed people close to the administration had been reaching out asking her not to do the interview, which as of Sunday night had been viewed over 23,000 times and shared by over 200 people.

That outreach, according to Cranston, was too little, too late.

“I am here because I have a little girl. I have a daughter, and I have to show her that when somebody wrongs you, you stand up. It doesn't matter what the circumstance is, you fight....I don't know if they expected me to just take it, but I can't. I know better. I have the knowledge and the competence to know better.”

Hours after the interview, the Consortium received another message from Government House. It read, “Government House is aware of the public accusations by Mrs. Danielle Cranston about unfair employment practices by the Virgin Islands Government. While it is standard employment practice not to comment on personnel matters in the workplace, to protect a current or former employee, if it is Mrs. Cranston choice, she will be offered the opportunity to appeal her separation in the appropriate setting. There will be no further comment until the personnel matter has been addressed by all parties concerned.”

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