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Roach and Sarauw Spar Over Role of Lieutenant Governor's Office, LGBTQ Discrimination and How They Would Lead as Governor

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Lt. Governor Tregenza Roach and Senator Janelle Sarauw on Monday sparred over several important functions of the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, and the topic of discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community in the Virgin Islands. The Office of the Lieutenant Governor is statutorily focused on Banking and Insurance, and Financial Regulation.

The candidates, both hoping to convince undecided voters to support their respective teams this election cycle, came face to face during a debate hosted by The V.I. Consortium and WTJX at the WTJX studios on St. Croix, and moderated by VIC Publisher Ernice Gilbert. The gubernatorial teams will go head-to-head on Thursday beginning at 7:00 p.m. (full details are [here](#)).

Ms. Sarauw was first out the gate with a response on a question regarding her role as lieutenant governor if the Violet-Sarauw team wins. The candidate said in May that she and gubernatorial candidate Sen. Kurt Violet had decided to split the responsibility of managing the government down the middle. "We've already agreed, I take half of the government and he takes half of the government, and we'll take on a more active role in the lieutenant governor's position," she said.

Pressed by Mr. Gilbert to inform the public on the government departments and agencies that she would be in charge of, and how she plans on bringing meaningful change to these government arms, the senator said the team had not finalized "what that would be yet," though she mentioned the Dept. of Sports, Parks and Recreation, the Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources, the Office of Disaster Recovery, "and a few other agencies, VITEMA would be one of them as well," she said.

"So we haven't finalized the outcome, but I do know that he cherishes what I bring to the table," Ms. Sarauw added. She was pressed by Mr. Gilbert, who told Ms. Sarauw that the Violet-Sarauw campaign has been chiding the Bryan administration for moving too slow on various fronts. "We're less than a month away from election day, and you're saying not only you have not finalized what that half of the government would be, you haven't even discussed in full how you would make those changes," Mr. Gilbert stated.

"The government has 26 departments and agencies, we've already discussed key ones, but that would be done via executive order in January," Ms. Sarauw responded. "Election is November 8, that's our first goal and we do have time. We have ample time to determine the additional agencies that we want to manage half and half."

Mr. Roach chided Ms. Sarauw for what he described as a conflating of the Office of the Governor, and the Office of the Lieutenant Governor. "I think it sounds good but I think it's totally unrealistic. I think it's different for a governor to say he's going to utilize his or her lieutenant governor as an oversight for a particulate agency. But what I'm listening to, it sounds as if we're going to have two governors, co-governors," Mr. Roach said. He said while Governor Bryan utilizes his expertise on a variety of issues, "when it comes down to it, there is one governor. There's not a governor of St. Croix and a governor of St. Thomas and St. John. And why our relationship works is that this role requires a certain amount of humility in its approach to be in the second in command."

Mr. Gilbert moved on to the lieutenant governor, pressing him on matters relating to health insurance and financial services. He charged that Mr. Roach's office had failed to secure affordable health insurance for uninsured Virgin Islanders, and that Mr. Roach has failed to convince banks to make funding more accessible to locals.

In response, Mr. Roach spoke of major accomplishments at the OLG, including the accreditation of the Banking and Insurance Division of the U.S. Virgin Islands for the first time, saying it "is the beginning of making our climate more hospitable to insurance companies and banks who desire to do business in the territory."

He said insurance for private citizens has been a difficult battle because "we're not under the Affordable Healthcare Act, and there is no mandate of health insurance required by our government or supported by our government for those who are privately employed." Mr. Roach said the OLG had looked into healthcare plans for private citizens available in the British Virgin Islands, and made known that the offering is being subsidized by the BVI government. "If we're going to do that it should be a legislative mandate as well," he said.

On the lack of accessibility to bank funding, Mr. Roach said he could not speak to the particulars as to why individuals may be denied loans, however, the OLG also plays an advocacy role, and he encouraged individuals who believe they may have been discriminated against to report such matters to his office.

Ms. Sarauw refuted Mr. Roach's claims that all the major banking institutions in the territory were offering construction loans, stating that during a recent Senate hearing only Banco Popular was offering such financing. "I am concerned in actuality as to why our banks aren't offering as they do in Puerto Rico. We'll say that they do, but technically they do not, and we put most of our money into Puerto Rican banks, and it's time that we leverage our resources that we have, negotiate and get them to offer those products. Homeownership has to be achievable," she said.

Mr. Roach said comparing Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, whose populations are vastly different at 3.2 million and under 100,000 respectively, is not a good measure to determine why certain products are offered in varying markets. "It's not impossible to think that a business may offer some products in one market that aren't in the other market," he said after mentioning the populations of both U.S. territories.

On the issue of discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community, Mr. Gilbert asked Ms. Sarauw to list five ways she would encourage a Violet-Sarauw administration to diminish such behavior. The senator spoke of legislation she has sponsored specifically for such matters, and said, "It was sad watching the he/she commentary, because the Violet-Sarauw team has never done that nor will they ever do that." Ms. Sarauw was referring to comments made against her during a recent Bryan-Roach virtually rally by a calypsonian.

Mr. Roach responded by calling out Ms. Sarauw for what he deemed to be a double standard. "The issue of utilizing, whether the perception or the reality of a person's sexual orientation is certainly not limited to any comments made to Senator Sarauw alone.

"Senator Sarauw made a post about that calypso, which I'm not defending, but she made a post on her page, targeted the LGBTQ community with whatever she said was said in the calypso, to essentially politicize it and say vote for me, not for them. But under that same post [there were] all kinds of comments with references to my sexuality. Questions to whether I am married to a man or a woman, and not by just saying the he/she in the calypso, but calling my name in the same post that the senator had on her [Facebook] page," Mr. Roach said.

The lieutenant governor said Ms. Sarauw did not respond to those comments. "You can't complain and say that you are a target of discrimination with regard to your sexual orientation, and still participate or allow conversations like that where you know the intent is the same," he went on.

Ms. Sarauw reminded that the original comment was made at a Bryan-Roach campaign rally with an apology coming several days later. She said the apology only came after public outcry and a viral video showing Calypsonian King Derby making the comments. She further stated that no one under her Facebook post had called Mr. Roach any names. "They retaliated in support saying listen, if you're going to call out one, do we question the other person. And we're actually not fair in this political arena, we don't judge men and women the same at all," she said.

Mr. Roach fired back: "There's a doctrine in the law that speaks to unclean hands. So when you come to the law for relief, you have to say that your hands are clean. So you can't be participating in the same kind of conversation and then need an apology addressed to you because you are offended by a particular reference. Your hands have to be clean as well. And if you think that an apology must be made directly to the candidate, then I think that that candidate also has the

responsibility to use that same platform to speak about the same injustices which she references, and what kind of remedial work that we must all do."

Watch the full debate [here](#).

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