

First the territory, now new administration embroiled in Jeffrey Epstein sex scandal

BRITNEY KNIGHT

ST. CROIX — The territory continues to make national headlines, this time with claims that the Virgin Islands government is planning to review convicted sex offender and St. Thomas resident Jeffrey Epstein's corporate sponsorship.

According to The Guardian, a Britain-based online newspaper, the government of the Virgin Islands "is to review its corporate sponsorships after it emerged that Jeffrey Epstein, the convicted sex offender and friend to Prince Andrew, gave gifts to school pupils and financed events for young children."

The article attributes certain quotes to Kimberly Jones, the recently hired spokeswoman for Gov. Kenneth Mapp, as well as other local government officials.

"Every situation is going to be

reviewed individually," the Monday article in The Guardian quotes Jones as saying. "It is important to note that this all happened under the previous administration."

When contacted Tuesday for comment by The Avis, Jones confirmed making the above statement but denied telling The Guardian that either the Mapp administration or the VI government were planning to review Epstein's corporate sponsorship.

Jones said other comments attributed to her were inaccurate and reiterated there are no active plans to investigate Epstein's corporate sponsorship.

The Guardian's article on Monday quoted her as saying: "I can't speak for the governor, but if it were up to me, there are certain people who would not be able to get on airplanes and travel here."

When asked by The Avis whether she had made those comments Jones was emphatic: "I never said that."

She said Tuesday questions regarding Epstein's corporate sponsorship and what legal actions they may bear should be directed to the Attorney General's Office.

According to The Guardian article, Epstein is registered as a "Tier 1" sex offender with the VI Department of Justice. The Guardian reported that Shani Pinney, a Justice Department official, said Monday that "Tier 1" offenders were barred from working or volunteering in schools and from "loitering on school property."

The Avis was unable to confirm Pinney's employment with the Justice Department as of press time.

Epstein, a billionaire financier, who owns a private island dubbed Little St. James near St. Thomas,

spent 13 months in jail in 2008 following guilty pleas in connection with soliciting girls for underage prostitution. He is known for his philanthropic ventures and is said to have funded a VI Department of Education science fair for grade-school students in the territory.

The Guardian article said the Jeffery Epstein VI Foundation, under the umbrella of the Southern Trust, Inc., funded the science fair last year. It also noted Epstein paid to transport prize-winning children to the fair on St. Thomas and funded their accommodations.

The territory was thrown into national headlines following recent allegations detailed in federal court documents filed Dec. 30 in Palm Beach, Florida that Britain's Prince Andrew and famed lawyer Alan Dershowitz were among the men in attendance at an alleged orgy at

Epstein's home.

Articles have appeared almost daily since earlier this month, linking the Virgin Islands to Epstein in both stateside print and online newspapers and as far away as Britain and Australia.

According to the court documents, a woman said she was forced to have sexual relations with Andrew and Dershowitz when she was a minor. Both Dershowitz and Buckingham Palace have adamantly denied the allegations.

Nobel Prize-winning physicist Stephen Hawking, who since age 21 has suffered from ALS, also has been dragged into the scandal because he attended a science conference sponsored on St. Thomas by Epstein.

A trip to Little St. James was said to be among the perks of the conference which included several noted scientists.

Police blotter

ST. CROIX

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ST. THOMAS ST. JOHN