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Jury Foreman Surprises Judge, Attorneys, By Nixing Honeymoon

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Los Angeles Superior Court. MyNewsLA.com Photo

Surprising attorneys and the judge, the foreman of a jury deliberating in the case of four Beverly Hills Police Department members who allege disparate treatment by the police chief said Friday he had scrubbed the honeymoon he planned to take after his wedding Sunday night so the panel can continue pondering the case without interruption.

"I'm good to go, we canceled our trip and I'll be here on Monday," the foreman told Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Elizabeth Feffer.

The jury deliberated for a short time Wednesday after hearing final arguments. Friday was the panel's first nearly full day discussing the case. There are no remaining alternate jurors left.

Prior to the foreman's announcement, the judge had said she planned to put deliberations on hold until the man returned from his honeymoon. She said she was going to inquire how long he expected to be away before excusing the entire panel for the day at 2 p.m.

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However, the courtroom assistant who looks after the jury each day returned from the jury room to the courtroom and revealed the foreman's surprise change of plans.

"I've never had this happen, I'm still kind of processing," Feffer said before the foreman entered the courtroom.

When the foreman was brought before the judge, he told her he was "frustrated," but he also was concerned that other jurors may lose money from their employers if they do not return to work soon. He added that while the deliberations going forward will be "a little challenging," he was hopeful they could be concluded in a timely manner.

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"I admire your dedication, it's very inspiring," Feffer said.

Plaintiffs' attorney Bradley Gage told the jury during his closing argument that his clients are entitled to millions of dollars for being subjected to disparate treatment by Chief Sandra Spagnoli, the city's first female police chief. Gage said Spagnoli also made inappropriate comments about age, ethnicity and religion that included calling Catholicism a "cult" and describing the common headwear of Jewish men as "funny hats."

"It's pretty fundamental and clear, you're not supposed to do that," Gage said.

But lawyer Brian Walter, on behalf of the city, said Spagnoli apologized and was reprimanded by the city for tasteless statements she did say, but that she was also blamed for having made remarks she actually never uttered.

Walter said Spagnoli upset some members of the department who were more accustomed to the previous regime of longtime Chief Dave Snowden, who held the job for 12 years.

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humidity: 52%
pressure: 30.07"hg
uv index: 4

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|---------|---------|---------|
| 71/52°F | 78/54°F | 73/53°F |
| | | |

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"She was brought in with a mandate to change the department," Walter said, noting the chief was criticized by some for scrutinizing a \$100 expense in a department with a multimillion-dollar budget.

"We think that's a good thing for the chief to be doing," Walter said.

Gage acknowledged that the atmosphere in the department was upbeat when Spagnoli arrived because many were excited about seeing a woman in the role of chief for the first time. But then the chief began learning about the personal backgrounds of the BHPD employees, finding out that some are gay and observe faiths different from hers, Gage said.

"The comments were all pleasant in the beginning," Gage said. "Things changed."

The plaintiffs are Lts. Renato Moreno, Shan Davis and Michael Foxen, and civilian employee Dona Norris, the BHPD's public safety communications and evidence manager.

Moreno maintains he has endured "pervasive" anti-Latino and anti-Catholic discrimination under Spagnoli and that matters came to a head when he provided deposition testimony on behalf of former Capt. Mark Rosen, who sued the city for discrimination and retaliation and settled for \$2.3 million. Rosen, who is Jewish, maintained Spagnoli made remarks offensive to Jewish people.

Foxen maintains he suffered a backlash when he notified management that Officer Lisa Weller, who is gay, was paid less than a heterosexual male officer with the same experience.

Davis was Norris' supervisor and alleges Spagnoli directed him to lower Norris' performance evaluation because she is gay. The chief never gave an explanation to justify lowering Norris' evaluation, according to Davis.

Spagnoli, who testified that she was raised as a Jehovah's Witness and is now a practicing Catholic, said she was reprimanded by city management for her remarks and ordered to undergo sensitivity training. She denied she was racist, homophobic or prejudiced against anyone because of their religion.

Spagnoli, 51, previously was the police chief for Benicia and San Leandro in Northern California, where she grew up.

JURY FOREMAN SURPRISES JUDGE, ATTORNEYS, BY NIXING HONEYMOON was last modified: July 6th, 2019 by Contributing Editor

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