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**Representative Thompson Responds to Jesse Panuccio
Comments**

ORLANDO, Fla. – State Representative Geraldine F. Thompson (D – Windermere) responds to **Judicial Nomination Commission member Jesse Panuccio’s** [comments](#) on elected officials and the appointment of an unqualified individual to the **Florida Supreme Court**, as well as the failed CONNECT unemployment system that has affected Floridians.

“**Jesse Panuccio** says he saw elected officials and people in the public do and say things that were a disgrace which dishonored their office during the 2020 controversy regarding the appointment of an unqualified individual to the **Florida Supreme Court**. Well, **Mr. Panuccio** should know a lot about dishonoring an office due to his disastrous implementation of the CONNECT unemployment system to serve Floridians who needed unemployment/reemployment assistance when he was Secretary of the **Department of Economic Opportunity**. Under **Jesse Panuccio’s** leadership, the CONNECT system, which cost Floridians \$77 million, did not work when he unveiled it and it does not work today.

“The CONNECT system touted by **Mr. Panuccio** was further revealed as a failure during the pandemic, which saw mass layoffs and furloughs. A single employer in my district furloughed 77,000 people who could not apply online for assistance, if they were lucky enough to get on the CONNECT site, which was described by **Governor Ron DeSantis** as a jalopy. Under **former Governor Rick Scott**, **Mr. Panuccio** was allowed to quietly exit his position as Secretary of the **Department of Economic Opportunity**. Upon taking office, **Governor Ron DeSantis** appointed **Ken Lawson** to the position, one of the few African Americans in his administration. Due to the failings of **Jesse Panuccio**, **Mr. Lawson** was scapegoated out of the job. That is a disgrace and a dishonor to the office **Mr. Panuccio** held.

“The Chair of the **Florida Supreme Court Nominating Commission** is not **Jesse Panuccio**. Yet, he has chosen to exert himself and his opinion as a spokesperson for the **JNC**. It is baffling that his dismal performance as **Secretary of the Department of Economic Opportunity** catapulted him to the critical role of recommending nominees to the highest court in the state of Florida. For his own questionable reasons, **Mr. Panuccio** has elected to be a protector and shield for an individual who the **Florida Supreme Court** ruled unanimously in 2020 to be ineligible to serve on the our state’s highest court.

“**Governor Ron DeSantis** promised in May of 2020 to investigate the failures of the CONNECT system. To date, nothing has been shared with Floridians regarding any CONNECT system investigation including who was in charge of oversight and who could have potentially benefitted from contracts regarding the system. That investigation should focus at the outset on **Jesse Panuccio**. Floridians should demand transparency and complete details regarding **Mr. Panuccio’s** role in the tragic harms caused by the CONNECT system. Perhaps, **Mr. Panuccio** will have a better record of recommending **Supreme Court Justices** than he did in installing a system to serve Floridians who found themselves unemployed through no fault of their own and who relied on a flawed system to provide support and assistance. That is a disgrace and a dishonor to the position of Secretary of the **Department of Economic Opportunity** under **Jesse Panuccio**.”

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