



## *Victor O. Frazer*

1943–

DELEGATE ★ 1995–1997

INDEPENDENT FROM THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Victor Frazer became the second black Delegate to represent the U.S. Virgin Islands in the U.S. House of Representatives after a surprise victory in 1995. During his brief stint in Congress, Frazer promoted the interests of his constituents in the American territory, focusing on procuring federal money for hurricane relief and attracting tourism to the eastern Caribbean.

Born on May 24, 1943, in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, to Albert Frazer and Amanda Blyden, Victor O. Frazer was one of 10 children.<sup>1</sup> After graduating from Charlotte Amalie High School in 1960, Frazer earned a B.A. from Fisk University, in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1964, and a J.D. from Howard University Law School in 1971. He worked as a lawyer for the District of Columbia Office of the Corporation Counsel (later called the Office of the Attorney General of the District of Columbia) from 1974 to 1978.<sup>2</sup> Employed as a banker for Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company, Frazer also worked as a lawyer for the Interstate Commerce Commission and the U.S. Patent Office.<sup>3</sup> He later served as general counsel for the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority from 1987 to 1989. Frazer acquired congressional experience as an administrative assistant for California Representative Mervyn Dymally, a special assistant for Michigan Representative John Conyers, and as counsel for the House Committee on the District of Columbia. Before winning a seat in the House, he also worked in a private legal practice. A divorcé, Frazer has two daughters, Kaaren and Aileene.<sup>4</sup>

In 1992, Frazer made an unsuccessful run for Congress against longtime Virgin Islands Delegate Ron de Lugo; Frazer, a Democrat who ran as an Independent, lost by more than 5,000 votes.<sup>5</sup> When de Lugo announced his retirement in 1994, Frazer orchestrated another attempt at elective office, again running as an Independent. In a

four-way race to represent the Virgin Islands in the U.S. House, he placed second to Eileen Petersen, a former judge, but qualified for the runoff election on November 22 since none of the candidates earned the necessary 50 percent of the vote to secure the nomination.<sup>6</sup> Frazer's campaign benefited from the endorsement of retired U.S. Ambassador Terrance Todman, overcoming meager campaign funds and the support of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) for his Democratic opponent, Petersen.<sup>7</sup> He upset Petersen in the runoff, winning 55 percent of the vote and astounding the experts; congressional publishers had to scramble to locate a photograph of Frazer for inclusion with those of the other new Members of the 104th Congress (1995–1997).<sup>8</sup> Elated by his success, Frazer proclaimed, “This is the people’s victory.”<sup>9</sup>

During the 104th Congress, Frazer served on the Committee on International Relations. As one of the five nonvoting Delegates in the House he was allowed to vote in committee but not on the House Floor. In the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), the rights of the Delegates and the Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner were expanded, allowing them to vote in the Committee of the Whole. However, when the Republicans took control of the House in 1995, they rescinded the privilege. “We are not less American because we live in the Virgin Islands,” Frazer remarked.<sup>10</sup> After several weeks of deliberation, Frazer opted to caucus with the Democratic Party and became one of a handful of non-Democratic Members to join the CBC.<sup>11</sup>

Delegate Frazer used his one term in Congress to highlight issues of concern to the residents of the Virgin Islands. When Hurricane Marilyn struck the chain of islands in 1995—St. Thomas sustained the most damage—Frazer worked with President William J. (Bill) Clinton to



ensure that the Virgin Islands received federal funds for disaster relief.<sup>12</sup> In the aftermath of the hurricane, Frazer emphasized the need for additional protection against natural disasters for his constituents. He urged the federal government to require private insurance companies to provide coverage for wind damage in their standard policies for homeowners in areas affected by hurricanes, such as the Caribbean islands.<sup>13</sup> In 1996 he sponsored legislation directing the Federal Emergency Management Agency to study the feasibility of insurance to provide protection from windstorms for residents of the Virgin Islands.<sup>14</sup>

Frazer also sought to revive the lagging tourism industry of the Virgin Islands—an essential segment of its economy. He backed the Travel and Tourism Partnership Act of 1995, aimed at promoting international travel and tourism to the United States because it “would enhance the limited resources of the Virgin Islands.”<sup>15</sup> Frazer also successfully lobbied for an increase in funds to fight the growing problem of international drug trafficking in the U.S. territory.<sup>16</sup> Shortly after he took office in 1995, Frazer joined the Representatives from Hawaii, the Delegates from Guam and American Samoa, and the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico, to protest a nuclear waste shipment originating in France and traveling through the Caribbean to Japan. The radioactive materials, which originated from Japanese nuclear plants, were shipped to France to extract plutonium and back to Japan as part of an energy program sponsored by the Japanese government.<sup>17</sup> Also concerned with the high poverty rate among his constituents, Frazer supported an increase in the federal minimum wage, warning that even though “the

Virgin Islands is considered an American paradise,” many of its residents lived below the poverty line.<sup>18</sup>

In his bid for re-election to the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Frazer portrayed himself as a zealous spokesperson for the Virgin Islands in the House and argued that his status as an Independent allowed him the flexibility to cross party lines so as to better represent the American territory.<sup>19</sup> His opponents criticized his legislative style, especially his frequent trips abroad. During his one term in office, Frazer took more than 10 trips overseas. He defended his travel as a necessary prerequisite for his membership on the International Relations Committee, assuring voters, “I have never traveled without promoting the Virgin Islands.”<sup>20</sup> In the campaign, Frazer’s two challengers contended that the incumbent should have lobbied for exemptions from the 1996 welfare reform legislation to protect the many impoverished citizens of the Virgin Islands. “No one member of Congress is going to hold back the tide of legislation,” Frazer responded. “We ought not to embrace welfare as something we welcome.”<sup>21</sup> None of the candidates in the general election earned 50 percent of the vote. Frazer finished ahead of Virgin Islands Lieutenant Governor Kenneth Mapp, but his other challenger, Donna Christian-Green, a physician, bested him 39 to 34 percent.<sup>22</sup> In the November 19, 1996, runoff, Frazer lost to Christian-Green by fewer than one thousand votes.<sup>23</sup> Shortly after the election, Frazer demanded a recount, but he failed to prove his claim of vote tampering.<sup>24</sup>

After his term in Congress, Frazer worked as an attorney in Washington, DC.<sup>25</sup>

## FOR FURTHER READING

“Frazer, Victor O.,” *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=F000351>.

## NOTES

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- 5 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” available at [http://clerk.house.gov/member\\_info/electionInfo/index.html](http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html).
- 6 “Retired Judge Wins Democratic Race to Succeed 10-Term Congressman,” 13 September 1994, Associated Press.
- 7 “Virgin Islands Elects First Black Delegate in 20 Years,” 19 December 1994, *Jet*: 8.
- 8 Anthony Faiola, “They’re in One Hill of a Hurry; Publishers of Congressional Guides Find Power Turnover Is No Grand Old Party,” 6 January 1995, *Washington Post*: B1.
- 9 Lynda Lohr, “Independents Break Democrats’ Grip on Delegate’s Seat, Government House,” 22 November 1994, Associated Press.
- 10 “Bill Giving Delegate to Guam and Virgin Islands Goes to Nixon,” 29 March 1972, *Washington Post*: A3; Doug Richards, “Reducing Voting Privileges Diminishes Meaning of Citizenship: Delegate,” 5 January 1995, Associated Press; Kay Johnson, “Incumbent Delegate Takes the Heat in Televised Debate,” 30 September 1996, Associated Press; Betsy Palmer, “Territorial Delegates to the U.S. Congress: Current Issues and Historical Background,” 6 July 2006, Report RL 32340, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- 11 *Almanac of American Politics, 1996* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 1995): 1483.
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- 13 Delegate Frazer made a prepared statement before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment on the Natural Disaster Protection Partnership Act of 1995. See Federal News Service, 18 October 1995.
- 14 *Congressional Record*, House, 104th Cong., 2nd sess. (19 September 1996): 23924.
- 15 *Congressional Record*, House, 104th Cong., 2nd sess. (5 June 1996): E1001.
- 16 “Charlotte Amalie, U.S. Virgin Islands,” 19 January 1996, Associated Press.
- 17 “6 U.S. Lawmakers Protest Japan’s Nuclear Waste Shipment,” 23 February 1995, Japan Economic Newswire; “Virgin Islands Broadcast News Summary,” 19 January 1995, Associated Press; Andrew Pollack, “A-Waste Ship, Briefly Barred, Reaches Japan,” 26 April 1995, *New York Times*: A13.
- 18 *Congressional Record*, House, 104th Cong., 2nd sess. (23 April 1996): 8609.
- 19 “Voters to Choose Territory’s Only Elected Federal Official,” 19 November 1996, Associated Press.
- 20 Kay Johnson, “Delegates’ Globetrotting Raises Eyebrows in Election Year,” 21 October 1996, Associated Press.
- 21 Johnson, “Incumbent Delegate Takes the Heat in Televised Debate.”
- 22 “Runoff Necessary in Virgin Islands Race,” 7 November 1996, *Sun-Sentinel* (Fort Lauderdale, FL): 22A; “Voters to Choose Territory’s Only Elected Federal Official.”
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- 25 “Victor O. Frazer,” *Who’s Who Among African Americans*.