

IN SUPPORT OF THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS TRANSFER DAY, MARCH 31, 2007

**HON. DONNA M. CHRISTENSEN**

OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 12, 2007*

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Madam Speaker, I rise with great pride to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the transfer of the three small islands in the Caribbean from Danish to American control on March 31st, 1917. On that day, the Danish West Indies became the U.S. Virgin Islands and my district, the district that consists of St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John and a host of other smaller islands became part of the American family.

The people of the U.S. Virgin Islands are both proud Virgin Islanders and proud Americans. We are a diverse community comprised of people who are native to the island, those who have moved there from Puerto Rico and many of the surrounding Caribbean island nations, mainlanders from the continental United States, and people from many other parts of Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In our 90 years, we have come to reflect the American melting pot, evolving from many people, yet striving to become one.

One of the aspects that make the U.S. Virgin Islands a special place is our reverence for our history and our past and our concern that we pass on to our children the story of how we came to this place and how we have lived here, and struggled here and thrived here.

Transfer Day, the day that our islands became part of the American family, has long been a source of pride as we have celebrated it over the years with parades and fanfare and speeches of historic significance. But our relationship with the United States of America, began long before 1917.

Christopher Columbus, credited with the discovery of the Americas stopped at Salt River Bay on the island of St. Croix on his second voyage, making it one of the only confirmed Columbus landing sites under the U.S. flag today.

One of this country's founding fathers, Alexander Hamilton, who also served as its first Secretary of the Treasury, spent his boyhood on St. Croix in the Virgin Islands, where he is said to have learned the rudiments of finance, as he worked as a clerk in the international trade business of his mentor Nicholas Cruger in the busy Caribbean port town of Christiansted. It was in the Virgin Islands that his talent was first noticed, as his writing in the local newspapers, in particular on the 1772 hurricane, spurred his supporters to send him to New York the next year where he became part of the brewing American Revolution.

The Virgin Islands with its natural harbors had long been a trading partner of the colonies of North America, and during the American Revolution, it was the small Danish fort on the western side of St. Croix, Ft. Frederik that was one of the first to salute the new American colors when one of its ships sailed into Frederiksted harbor.

The United States of America recognized the strategic importance of the tiny Virgin Islands, then known as the Danish West Indies as early as 1865 when negotiations began for their purchase. According to historians, "the

need for military bases at strategic points in the Caribbean" was bolstered by the construction of the Panama Canal. Purchasing the Virgin Islands became important because it would "enable the United States to defend the approaches to the Panama Canal and it would prevent the islands from falling into the hands of countries that were hostile to the United States."

During World War I, it was the fear that Germany wanted a foothold in the Caribbean and fear that Denmark, who owned the islands at the time would be overrun by the Germans in the war, that prompted a more aggressive approach towards their purchase. By January 1916, "agreement was reached on \$25 million as a compromise between the Danish demand for \$27 million and the American offer of \$20 million."

We are told by our parents and grandparents that Transfer Day, March 31, 1917 was one of mixed emotions. While some were excited at the prospect of becoming part of the American nation, others were sad that the ties with Denmark that were 250 years old were about to be broken. Residents of the islands were given the choice of Danish or American citizenship and some remained loyal to the Danish flag while others enthusiastically embraced their new nation.

The United States of America entered World War I one week after the Virgin Islands were transferred to its ownership and the islands were placed under Navy rule as they were used as a coaling depot for U.S. ships during that period. The Navy enacted a number of social reforms to include reorganizing the hospitals and improving its equipment, instituting a sanitary code and mosquito control which drastically reduced the death rate. They also built the St. Thomas catchment and the St. Croix Creque Dam which increased the amount of safe, reliable drinking water. They instituted a sewage disposal system, and a fire and police system. They built and improved schools and trained and hired teachers at a higher rate of pay. They were not as successful at economic development and annual revenues plunged to less than what it was under the Danes, prompting an out-migration to then U.S. controlled territories like Cuba, Puerto Rico, Panama and the mainland. During that time, new immigrants from Puerto Rico and the mainland and an increased birth-rate due to better sanitation bolstered the population numbers.

It was in 1931 that the Department of the Interior was given the authority to administer the islands and charged with the economic regeneration of the islands. It was during that time that the first civilian governor was appointed, Dr. Paul M. Pearson who was responsible for the institution of the homestead program which allowed for the purchase of old plantation lands for homes and small farms. It was during this period that our tourism industry began as the first three hotels were built on St. Thomas and that opportunities for higher education were provided with scholarships to Hampton and Howard Universities for our worthy students. But the economy of the islands was still in need of a shot in the arm and political development was still in its infancy. These were the cause of discontent among the people.

It was not until 10 years after the Transfer, on February 25, 1927, that United States citizenship was granted through congressional

enactment to all natives of the Virgin Islands and residents on and after January 17, 1917 including those who moved to the U.S. or Puerto Rico before or after January 17, 1917 who had not become citizens of any foreign country and to all children born in the Virgin Islands on or after January 17, 1917.

Another Act of Congress in 1932 further extended U.S. citizenship to all natives of the Virgin Islands living in the United States or any other U.S. territory who were not citizens of any foreign country regardless of their place of residence on January 17, 1917.

It was in the years between the Transfer and the early 1930s, that the people began awakening to their political power and began agitation for more local, democratic control, extended voting rights, and other enfranchisement common to the American Nation. Advocacy through the local press came from men such as Rothschild Francis on St. Thomas, D. Hamilton Jackson on St. Croix and Casper Holstein, a wealthy St. Croix born New Yorker. They began pushing for more local democratic control of the institutions that governed the people of the Virgin Islands.

In this atmosphere, under some political unrest which included demonstrations and congressional inquiries and investigations, two major constitutional achievements were gained, namely the right of women to vote in December of 1935 and the passage of the First Organic Act on June 22, 1936.

The First Organic Act was said to represent a considerable extension of political power with the creation of two municipal councils, St. Thomas-St. John and St. Croix and a Legislative Assembly consisting of the two councils. Property and income qualifications were abolished, but English literacy was required of voters. Other features of the Act were a governor appointed by the President, who had veto power which could be overridden by a two-thirds majority of the Council, with final decision making rested in the President. The governor was also required to report annually to the Secretary of the Interior on financial transactions.

It was during this period that the first of our Virgin Islands soldiers began fighting and dying for their new country. Whether joining the military from Puerto Rico, the closest enlisting station to the territory or from where they had migrated in New York or elsewhere, our young men joined to defend our nation and some of them paid the ultimate sacrifice.

It was after World War II, in the period between 1950 and 1970, with increased economic expansion and political power that the population in the Virgin Islands began to double and triple. It was the result of increased birth rate, immigration from the mainland, Puerto Rico and the surrounding Caribbean islands to fill the new jobs created by the expanding tourism industry and the new oil and aluminum refineries and watch industry. There was also a movement of native Virgin Islanders who had moved away in earlier decades for economic opportunity back to the islands.

In 1950, the first native Virgin Islander, Morris deCastro was appointed governor. With his appointment came the recognition by the United States of the growing ability of the people of the Virgin Islands to govern themselves. The growth of political parties and the increased participation of the electorate, the growth and diversification of the economy and the population all set the stage for the need to

revise the Organic Act to provide for the political and administrative re-organization of the Virgin Islands. With the Revised Organic Act of 1954, the present governmental structure of the Virgin Islands with its laws, administrative departments and its unicameral legislature were formed. The English literacy requirement instituted in 1936 was removed paving the way for Spanish speaking residents to have a voice in governmental affairs.

In 1968, after the First Constitutional Convention of 1964–65, the Elective Governor Act of 1968 provided for an elected governor and Lt. governor to serve four year terms, a delegate to Congress, and the lowering of the voting age to 18. In 1970, the U.S. Virgin Islands elected the first of its seven governors to office. The Honorable Melvin Evans was elected the first Governor. My predecessor, the Honorable Ron de Lugo became our first Delegate to Congress and I am proud to serve as the fourth elected and first woman Delegate to Congress.

Since that time there have been several attempts to deal with the internal structure of our government, through drafting a new Constitution in 1981 and through a referendum on the nature of the territory's relationship to the United States which culminated in a referendum in 1993. This summer, Virgin Islanders will again attempt to draft a constitution to address many of the structural issues that continue to pose challenges to governance and every day living. It is my hope that on the 90th anniversary of the Transfer and our sojourn as part of the American family that we use it to analyze, plan and bring to fruition a common vision for our territory by 2017, the hundredth anniversary celebration.

Madam Speaker, there is much good that has come from this 90-year-old relationship between the U.S. Virgin Islands and the United States of America. Our islands have not only grown in population and diversity, but have made strides in governmental infrastructure and the provision of services in health, education, transportation infrastructure, and social welfare. Much of this has been accomplished in partnership with the federal government. There are many challenges that have also arisen because of rapid growth and development and lack of control over issues such as border control and the lack of a plan to manage our resources to include land and water use. We have been a beacon for development and advancement in the region and have attracted people from all over the world. It is my hope that this 90th anniversary will strengthen our resolve to become a stronger, more cohesive community with a dream and a plan for peace and prosperity into this 21st century and beyond.

RECOGNIZING THE COMMUNITY OF  
COLLYER, KANSAS

**HON. JERRY MORAN**

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 12, 2007*

Mr. MORAN of Kansas. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the citizens of Collyer, Kansas for continuing efforts to sustain and revitalize their community.

On September 26, 2004 that effort was formalized through creation of the Collyer Com-

munity Alliance. Donna Malsom, president of the alliance, said the organization was formed because residents want to see their hometown raise another generation of Kansans. "Our community is made up of hard working individuals who pull together to support businesses, projects and each other, Malsom said. "Through our combined efforts, we made a conscious decision to 'save' our community."

Despite its small size—133 people—Collyer is making a large commitment to its future. In the nearly 30 months since it was formed, the alliance has grown from zero to more than 200 paid memberships.

In order to obtain financing for community initiatives, the alliance has conducted a number of fundraising activities—the most famous of which are fish fries that are held every Friday evening during the Lenten season. In 2006, more than 1,000 plates were served. Having personally attended a fish fry, I can affirm that the food is delicious and the community spirit is inspiring.

Funds have also been raised by organizing Hunter's Burgers and Brats and Ground Hog Celebration Soup suppers, the Walsh Auction Lunch, Quinter School Forensics Tournament Lunch, WaKeeney Trash and Treasure Flea Market, Quinter May Day Celebration, Switchback Benefit Barn Dance and alumni celebrations. Money raised from these activities is supplemented by generous financial support from individuals, families, businesses and local units of government. Since its inception, approximately 75 entities have achieved "sponsor" status through the alliance.

This fundraising effort translates into impressive promotion of and support for the community. Last year, the Collyer Café opened in the refurbished Saint Michael's Convent. The alliance purchased the convent and the community donated well over 1,000 volunteer hours to this restoration project.

In July, the community hosts an After Harvest Music Festival which brings approximately 500 people to town. In October, the Fall Street Festival attracts more than 1,000 visitors to Collyer.

The alliance further promotes Collyer by maintaining an extensive website at [www.collyerks.com](http://www.collyerks.com). The site includes a history of the community, ongoing development projects, fundraising activities and community events.

An effort is being made to preserve the legacy of Collyer by obtaining historical designations on 14 community buildings. The Saint Michael's Buildings, Zeman Dance Hall, the old mercantile/grocery store and the Collyer Depot are just a few of these historically significant structures. With persistent effort, the alliance has achieved 501(C)3 nonprofit status retroactive to May of 2005. This approval is allowing the community to aggressively pursue restoration efforts.

An additional boost to preserve Collyer's legacy occurred in May of 2006 when the community was awarded a grant from the Kansas Humanities Council in support of an initiative to gather and record stories of immigrant families that settled in Collyer. Alliance members supplied the volunteer hours needed to complete this and several other grant applications.

Sandra Stenzel, community volunteer, acknowledges that the work required to create a future for Collyer is not easy. However, she believes the effort is worth it. "Our community

was founded on the principles of faith, freedom, education, progress and agriculture," Stenzel said. "We are proud of our past, but we are even prouder of the vision we have for the future and the plan we have to get there."

For rural communities to survive and prosper, citizens must be willing to create their own opportunities for success. Ongoing efforts to revitalize Collyer are an example of how hard work, vision and involvement support can create just such an opportunity. Citizens throughout Kansas are working together to enhance the quality of life in their communities. Collyer is a developing success story that demonstrates how teamwork and creative thinking can make a positive difference in rural America.

WALTER REED MEDICAL CENTER

SPEECH OF

**HON. DANNY K. DAVIS**

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, March 7, 2007*

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, the scandal at Walter Reed Army Medical Center has placed a spotlight on our entire military and veteran health care system. That is a good thing because the system is in need of a thorough reorganization. As a result of cuts in VA health care, more than a quarter of a million vets were refused enrollment in 2005 alone because they "didn't qualify". How many of these men and women were told when they reported for duty that they may or may not "qualify" for veteran's care after separation?

Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the notion that America's promise to its veterans is subject to later, arbitrary qualifications, but that quarter of a million veterans is the number we know of. Perhaps even more insidious are those vets who because of their PTSD or other injuries were discharged with less than honorable discharges most of the time with no hearing, no review. These men and women now reside in a kind of abyss between earth and hell. They have served their nation but their nation has turned its collective backs on them.

Mr. Speaker, we need to recall Vietnam Vet Jim Hopkins who finally drove his Jeep into the lobby of the Wadsworth VA Hospital out of frustration and protest in 1981. Jim Hopkins didn't get the treatment he needed and couldn't get anyone in the VA or the administration to listen to him. His subsequent tragic death led to a fifty-three day hunger strike by vets and finally shed some national light on our refusal to acknowledge the reality of PTSD and the impact of dioxin on the human nervous system. Now, a quarter of a century later there are many more frustrated vets, men and women who responded when their nation called, men and women who we have promised lifetime medical care in return who are shut out of the VA system. Men and women have been kicked to the curb, unseen and unserved. Mr. Speaker, the hour and day have come: it is time for this Congress, in turn, to kick open the doors of the VA system—to ensure that every veteran, every veteran, has received his or her due for their service.