

HONORABLE JAMES A. O'BRYAN, JR.

Post Office Box 600325, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00801

Good morning, Chairperson Carla J. Joseph, and other members of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, other testifiers, and fellow Virgin Islanders:

My name is James A. O'Bryan, Jr. I am a three-term former State Chairperson of the Virgin Islands Democratic Party, a member of the 16th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, and a government service retiree of 42 years in the Executive and Legislative branches of the Virgin Islands, and one service in the House of Representatives of the United States. I am a Virgin Islander by birth, mindset, and choice.

I appear in support of Bill No. 35-001, honoring and commending former Senator Horace A. Callwood, Sr. posthumously for his dedication, service, and commitment to the people of the Virgin Islands and naming the north-south street immediately east of Windward Passage in his memory. It is a recognition well deserved and I commend the sponsors of this proposal and urge its passage and signing into law.

A few weeks ago, my friend, Larry Sewer sent me the report of the Executive Committee Membership of the Progressive Guide Party, the first political party in the Virgin Islands. The names on it constitute a virtual who's who of the early political history of the Virgin Islands of the United States. Walter Lewis, Thersita Brown, Edith Williams, Adele Plaskett, Omar Brown, Oswald Harris, Alphonse LaBorde, Henry Richards, Alberto Stalliard, Alphonso Christian, Aubrey Ottley, and my father, James A. O'Bryan, Sr., and more.

That organization of the 1930s evolved into what is today one of the oldest, if not the oldest political party in the Caribbean region, the Democratic Party which is observing its sixtieth year of existence in 2023. And with eleven members of this body, the Government House, and the Delegate's position under Democratic control, I would argue the party is going strong.

Horace Callwood was one of the many young people Senator Early B. Ottley, Valdemar Hill, Patrick William, Ron de Lugo, Teresita Nunez, Alexander Farrelly, Warren Brown, Ralph Paiewonsky, Randal "Doc" James, Marylyn Stapleton, Ethlyn Farrington Joseph, Percival Reese, John Maduro, Annie de Chabert, Earl Harris, Leroy Gottlieb, Dorothy Elskoe, and many others, recruited and called to service to build a modern and progressive Virgin Islands.

Along with Horace came Elmo Roebuck, Lloyd Williams, Roger Hill, Ulla Muller, Verne Hodge, Anne Callwood, Horace's mom, Cleone Creque, Rudy Krigger, Dr. Charles Turnbull, and many more.

I join with all Virgin Islanders and people who adhere to Democratic Party principles in honoring the memory and political service of former Senator Horace Callwood. His legacy is many years of service and advocacy on behalf of achieving a better and more progressive Virgin Islands.

On the day I first took the oath as Democratic state chairperson, Horace came up to me and whispered in my ear, "Remember 35% of the people will never vote for this party. You make sure you fight for the 65% that will." It was a reminder that politicians cannot please everyone, but always seek to please the majority. What wonderfully wise words.

Horace Callwood brought grace, class, civility, wise counsel, integrity, dedication, patience, and commitment to the Virgin Islands in general and the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands in particular. He mentored many up-and-coming political leaders, some sitting in this chamber listening to me today. He was always willing to give useful and pertinent advice and was always there generously giving. We are better people because of it.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr: captured his legacy best at his passing, "Horace Callwood dedicated his life to public service to benefit St. Thomas and the greater Virgin Islands community. He was a committed community advocate, entrepreneur, and notable legislator. He was a stalwart Democrat, who's unwavering devotion and tireless work to build a strong, active Democratic Party, earned him the honor of having one of the territory's most active democratic clubs named in his honor. He also served as president of the Rotary of St. Thomas II Club.

Resigning in disgrace due to the Watergate scandal in 1974, President Richard Nixon said it best and the discussions Horace and I had when we got together at the Delly Deck for lunch embodied them. "Always give your best, never get discouraged, never be petty; always remember, others may hate you, but those who hate you don't win unless you hate them, and then you destroy yourself." That is my message for future generations of Virgin Islands leaders.

Learn to leave old political battles behind. A century before, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln asserted, “The best way to destroy your enemies is to make them your friends.” That is my recommendation to those who seek to lead. Discharge old wars and let old disputes go. Seek common ground by promoting compromise, mutual respect, and accommodation. Seeking peace for the real enemy is the difficult challenge that confronts our people. That is what Horace Callwood believed, personified, and promoted.

In my 1988 campaign for the senate, I wrote, “We are the heirs of Virgin Islanders who have traveled the turbulent seas of history to freedom and economic progress. It has not always been easy, but, after years of toil, we cannot rest at anchor in the harbor.”

Horace Callwood urged us never to rest, preached, and insisted that we, as a people prevail in economics, job opportunities, health, technology, and individual freedom. Honor his memory by passing this bill, following his example, and fulfilling the dreams of those who care before, and we will prove worthy of the honor of being called the heirs of those who came before.

I am grateful for this opportunity to present my view.