

Testimony for the award for Alfred O. Heath
Resolution 23-0639

Cora L.E. Christian, MD, MPH

Good afternoon, Senator Carla J. Joseph, Chair of
OPERATIONS, VETERAN AFFAIRS
AND CONSUMER PROTECTION, Senator Javan E. James,
Sr., Vice Chair of Operations, Veteran Affairs and Consumer
Protection,
Committee members: Senator Ray Fonseca, Senator Kenneth L.
Gittens, Senator Samuel Carrion Jr., Senator Milton Potter,
Senator Alma Francis Heyliger, Non-committee members:
Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Senator Diane T. Capehart, Senator
Novelle E. Francis, Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, Senator
Marise E. James, Senator Franklin D. Johnson, Senator Angel
Bolques, Senator Dwayne M DeGraff

Invited testifiers and the viewing and listening audience.

We must congratulate Senator Fonseca for Resolution 23-0639," an Act to commission and direct the Virgin Islands Council of the Arts to construct and erect a bronze bust of Dr. Alfred O. Heath to be placed next to those of Edith L Williams, J. Antonio Jarvis, and Rothschild Francis in the Education Park on the island of St. Thomas and for other purposes." You may not be aware, but Dr. Heath's father, Oswald Heath's pharmacy, was directly adjacent to that park. And, you know, Dr. Heath practiced pharmacy there before he became a physician. Oswald Heath must be smiling down to know his son also honors him.

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Senator Fonseca' resolution 23-0639 details only a portion of the wonderful journey of Dr. Alfred Oswald Heath. Still, we thank Senator Fonseca not only for working on this resolution but for working closely with Governor Bryan to fulfill Dr. Heath's dream by acquiring Seaview to serve the most fragile of us.

Sedonie Halbert, a former Commissioner of Human Services, who has worked without compensation with the Adolescent Program because of her commitment to Dr. Heath's vision, said it so well, if I may quote her,

"The closing of St. Thomas Health Care Management Adolescent Program, preceded by the closure of The Sea View Nursing Home and Rehabilitation Facility, marks the end of a vision by Alfred O. Heath, MD, who dedicated his life to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in our community. Despite the obstacles, shortfalls, and financial struggles over the last 25 years of operating an organization for elderly persons and adolescents in crisis, he pursued his dream at great personal financial sacrifice. I hear the cries of families, professionals, and friends as they search for safe facilities to place their loved ones and clients because our limited resources cannot meet their needs. We can continue the more than 12-year debate over the selling and buying of the Sea View property, or we can carry the mantle Dr. Heath who is no longer able to and move expeditiously to do whatever we can to address the dire need in our community. I suggest the latter."

To chronicle all of Dr. Heath's accomplishments in the resolution would require a book-size document. I thought it

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would be good to spend my time giving testimony of this Physician, Community Activist, Businessman, Government Administrator, Philanthropist, Husband, Father, cousin, and brother by intertwining some of his contributions to see his journey but not lose sight of his true character. I sum it up in this sentence:

"Full manhood is found through active membership in the community."

This quotation briefly identifies the character and contributions to the Virgin Islands Community of Alfred O. Heath, my first cousin and faithful brother.

But how did he do it?

Educator Marva Collins observed that "success doesn't come to you... you go to it." Alfred O. Heath's journey to that success became an ever-widening path. Stops along the way included pharmacist, surgeon, Chief of Surgery, Chief Executive Officer of the St. Thomas Hospital, U.S. Virgin Islands Commissioner of Health on two separate occasions, held every office of the Virgin Islands Medical Society, and a founder and board member of the Virgin Islands Medical Institute. This non-profit corporation evaluated the quality of care for the people of the Virgin Islands for over 38 years. Dr. Heath started the first and only certified skilled nursing facility in the Virgin Islands, Seaview, where older patients could receive first-class care and had the only Medicare-certified home health agency in the U.S. Virgin Islands. At the same time, he rose to the rank of

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Assistant Adjutant General and Brigadier General of the V.I.
Army National Guard,

The presence and voice of Alfred O. Heath is seen and heard in his civic activities as Chair of the Board of Trustees and also of the Foundation of the University of the Virgin Islands, Co-chair of the Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral Campaign Fund Raiser, member of the Advisory Council of the Boy Scouts of America and for the Reichold Cultural Center, member of Rotary International, Fourth Degree member of the Knights of Columbus, member, and soloist of the Caribbean Chorale and recipient of the highest award that can be bestowed upon a Virgin Islander from the Legislature of the Virgin Islands to name a few.

President Daisaku Ikeda said, "There is a great difference between simply living a long life and living a full and rewarding life. What's really important is how much rich texture and color we can add to our lives during our stay here on Earth" My chronicling of just a portion of Al's contributions shows that his life is one of rich texture and color with many rewards.

How did he do it?

Van Gogh must have known my cousin Al, who is more like a brother to me than a cousin, for Van Gogh said, "Love many things, for therein lies the true strength, and whatever is done in love is done well." It is clear that Al loves many things and many people. His love for medicine, his love for music, his love for travel, his love for flying, his love for fellowship, his love for fun. A powerful man. A proud man. A mysterious man. An accomplished man. He shines forth as brightly as

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sapphire, ruby, emerald, and gold, all together, enhancing the beauty of each person and shimmering us with timeless enjoyment.

I will highlight just a few of his greatest strengths, for there are too many to mention:

Perseverance:

My father, the late Judge Alphonso A. Christian, who loved his church at least equally to the love of his family, stated a great cleric, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, said at the Commencement Exercises of his nephew-in-law, Dr. Alfred O. Heath, in 1957, perseverance, is the greatest of all the virtues. Without that on his part, much of what I will say would not have occurred because Al has many virtues, but one that seems always to be ever-present is perseverance.

Confidence:

Clearly, one of the cornerstones of education lies in a parent's capacity to believe in their children, support them, and inspire them with a sense of confidence. It is clear that his mother, my Mom's Sister, Mrs. Josephine Heath, did so with her children. Auntie Josie was strong, self-directed, but gentle and kind. She gave both Al and Alma, Al's twin sister, confidence in their unique and unbounded spirit. It is the generosity of the heart of women that often allows other humans, male or female, to fulfill their dreams.

Commitment:

I have to tell you a little melee and family discord that happened, for every story has to have some melee. Al was asked to run as Lt. Governor with Attorney Derek Hodge for Governor. They ran against Dr. Roy L. Schneider for Governor and Kenneth E. Mapp for Lt. Governor, who later became Governor. My Mom went to her nephew, Al, to ask him if he was going to run with Derek, for Derek was also a close friend of the family. Al told her, No. So, my Mom then pledged her support for Dr. Schneider. She was like a 'comado' or godmother to Schneider. But then Al changed his mind because the Democratic Party pressured him, and he was committed to the party. But my Mom, his aunt, continued her support for the Schneider/Mapp team. Of course, Auntie Josie came to speak to her younger sister to tell her she had to withdraw from supporting Schneider, and my Mom refused, saying she had already done what she should have done to clear the way. The two sisters stopped talking. It took me taking both of them on a month-long trip to Africa when one was 75 and the other 81 years of age to get them time together to start talking again. It was not easy. It took years. Politics, politics, politics! I would have loved Al to travel with us to help me with the fire and fury, but all ended well. This family understands commitment. Subsequently, Al traveled together with us to Istanbul, and we had a fabulous time.

Strong-minded independence:

He is smart with a strong personality and a terrible temper, but he has a kind heart. His mental capacity is consistently noticeable in his quickness and ability at various tasks simultaneously; this served him well as a physician and a surgeon.

Thoughtful and kind:

Al loves the skies. I do, too, but I like to ride along. He wants to soar. He used his love for flying to show his thoughtfulness and kindness to me so many times (over 38 times) in our trips to St. Kitts, my husband's home, Dr. Simon Jones-Hendrickson, each Christmas. But there was one time I had to present a paper at the Caribbean Studies Association in St. Lucia. I needed to go, give my presentation, and come right back home. We all know how difficult it is to travel throughout the Caribbean. I was able to attend due to the kindness of my bro, Dr. Heath, who flew me down and back on the same day.

Dr. Heath, Bro – cousin and visionary, one who every day I place my palms together in deep respect and gratitude, chanting that he continued and continued and continued like the ever-ready battery that he was. But as it will be for all of us, there comes a time to rest. As with the cycle of life – birth, aging, illness, and death, he is now in the stage of illness and aging. Bro is resting; we can now care for him as he has done for so many.

—My cousin and brother—I could go on forever, for what have you not done? Who have you not helped? Where have you not been? When have you ever said no? How have you lived? The (kwɪn(t)ə'sen(t)ʃhəl] quintessential Renaissance man. I beam with pride to know that I have been blessed by such a gifted bloodline. I can find no

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**better way to end this testimony than to say we
love you.**