

Testimony honoring Dr. Ralph A. deChabert

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Executive Secretary/Treasurer of the Virgin

Islands Medical Society (VIMS)

Good morning 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 Novelle E. Francis,
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 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.

It is easy to sustain our concern for someone who is
before our very eyes, but it is quite a different thing
when that person is far away even though, in our
hearts, we have not forgotten them. This is an
additional reason why we must congratulate Senator
Gittens and Senator James for this resolution that
details the wonderful journey of Dr. Ralph de
Chabert.

Dr. de Chabert's journey has been chronicled in your resolution today. Although it is worth being repeated, I thought it would be good to spend my time giving testimony about my personal relationship with this quiet, reserved, and powerful physician who made me understand it is not the loud bark that is the most effective but the one who quietly rules.

In 1975, I made preparations to come home to work. I had applied to the Virgin Islands Department of Health (VIDOH), which at that time controlled all health care (including both hospitals) except for physician private practices. I had received

confirmation that my NOPA had been processed. But when I arrived in St. Croix, I was told that my position had been given to Dr. Donna Christian Green; it was an error. At that time, Dr. de Chabert was Assistant Commissioner and Medical Director of the Charles Harwood Hospital. The only thing he knew about me was through his mom, for my mom and his mom were BIG Anglicans- my mom being the Secretary of All Saints Cathedral Church and his mom, Ms. Annie as she was called and was as revered as any priest in St. Croix worked together on separate islands on behalf of the Anglican church.

Ms. Annie's only failure was that she was a woman but had more authority than most priests.

Despite that relationship, and my dad being born and raised in Frederiksted, I was seen as a St. Thomian.

However, my spirit of Never Give Up allowed me to assign myself to the Ingeborg Nesbitt Clinic (INC), working for six months free of charge. INC was a small, 19-bed facility that provided in-patient services, ob-gyn services for babies born in Frederiksted, an emergency room, and an outpatient clinic. Dr. Tomas Evangelista and Dr. Al Cepedo manned the INC in-patient, and an African physician and I initially manned the ER and I helped with all

three. Little did I know that Dr. de Chabert had been responsible for many of the Filipino physicians coming to St. Croix. But I was allowed to work for free for six months as long as I wanted to. I grew in Dr. de Chabert's favor for our small ob-gyn deliveries at the INC as well as other services, which was soon turned over to me as a responsibility, helped Charles Harwood Memorial Hospital, where Dr. deChabert was also medical director, get accredited. Still, our interaction was limited. I doubt Dr. deChabert knew who I was other than I was willing to work.

Governor King, who had won the election in 1974, changed everything in 1976. At that time, Dr. deChabert and I were very active members of The Virgin Islands Medical Society (VIMS). Dr. Andre Galiber Sr. was president of VIMS, and I was secretary. VIMS inserted itself in the process when Governor King attempted to recruit a Commissioner of Health. VIMS recruited Dr. Roy Lester Schneider as one of the candidates for Commissioner of Health. Governor King chose Dr. Schneider but, with the same stroke, removed Dr. deChabert from both his responsibilities as Medical Director and Assistant Commissioner. We were blindsided. Dr.

Heath, who was Commissioner at the time, resigned, and Dr. John Moorhead became Acting Commissioner of Health until Dr. Schneider was confirmed in 1977. An eager beaver, I, Cora did not know what she was in for. Dr. de Chabert never said anything to me about my responsibilities when I took over his position of Assistant Commissioner for St. Croix. I never received a single file or note from Dr. de Chabert. I found it odd, for I knew he had to have had files, having been in the position for a good period of time. But I quickly learned this very quiet man was the 'silent' boss. He was sending his message to the new Administration silently but

effectively. Fortunately, he grew to like my attitude and my work, and I was found to be worthy in every endeavor he and Dr. Andre Galiber Sr. championed.

But another significant story must be told for all to understand that Dr. de Chabert's love was first for St. Croix, second for St. Croix, and always for St. Croix. Medicine was the vehicle through which he would make sure St. Croix was reckoned with. I have many stories that illustrate his love for St. Croix. But I will tell you one more. This final story binds together his love for St. Croix and his passion for medicine, which is evident from the resolution for all the many healthcare providers- doctors and

nurses he convinced to give services in St. Croix and make it their home. The story is about establishing V.I. Equicare, LLC, our only Preferred Provider Organization (PPO).

At that time, we continued to both be very active in the Virgin Islands Medical Society. I continued as the secretary of the Society. Dr. George Rosenberg was trying to establish the PPO, but CIGNA, the health insurer then, would not budge unless it was all Virgin Islands' physicians. I had previously founded the Virgin Islands Medical Institute, VIMI, to improve the healthcare system by focusing on improving the quality of care delivered by

physicians, especially in the hospital, which would reduce the cost the insurance companies desperately wanted. It is well established that when you improve quality, you reduce costs. I saw the purpose; I saw the need. Dr. Rosenberg needed St. Croix for CIGNA to start the discussion but could not make any headway in convincing the St. Croix physicians. He had spoken to Dr. de Chabert and Dr. Andre Galiber, Sr. many times but could not get any headway. So, George Rosenberg came to me. I understood how the PPO could benefit all of us, but to get St. Croix, I had to convince Dr. de Chabert of how this would help St. Croix. Of course, you know

the end result because we have a PPO, we have V.I. Equicare. Although there were other crucial decision points in the ability to establish the PPO, the first step was to convince Dr. de Chabert for without his blessing, St. Croix would have been a NO, and that would end it all, both for St. Thomas and St. Croix. I end where I begin. He never barked; he never made noise; he contributed in every way he could to the growth and development of health care, especially on the island of St. Croix. We honor and pay tribute to this silent man whose contributions are now articulated in this resolution and in the

testimonies we will all share. His contributions will
live on forever in our hearts and our history books.

On behalf of all physicians, the Virgin Islands
Medical Society thank you for this resolution
honoring, Dr. Andre Ralph deChabert.