

TESTIMONY  
THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, VETERANS AFFAIRS  
AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

June 28, 2024

Good morning, Madam Chair, Senator Carla Joseph, Vice Chair, Senator Javan James, Sr., members of the Committee, other members of the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislature, legislative staff, in chamber, viewing and listening audience – fellow Virgin Islanders.

One might wonder how many Claire Roker's are there, because every place you go and at events you only hear about, she is there.

Well as you will hear from everyone this morning, there is only One Claire Lorraine Brown Roker – and there is no other like her.

It seems like I have known Claire all my life, but it's probably most of my adult life – and that in itself spans a good number of years, so it is a true honor and privilege to be able to testify in strong and enthusiastic support of Bill number 35-0239, a Bill naming the Visitors Center at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility the Claire L. Roker Visitors Center.

I am joined in support and appreciation that the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislature saw fit to bestow this well deserved and exquisitely appropriate honor on our Claire by my family and my Congressional staff of which Claire was an integral part?

Everyone loved working with Claire and shared some of their thoughts:

“Always has a genuine, welcoming smile that radiates the love and pride she has for the VI and her people, altho St. Croix is her first love”;

“Hard worker, loyal friend, trailblazing businesswoman. Possesses boundless love for the Virgin Islands and its people especially her beloved Frederiksted”;

“One of the founders of FEDA and of the organizers of their signature sunset jazz concerts”;

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“A current Member and past treasurer on the board of Trustees for Our Town Frederiksted. Some call her the Mayor of Frederiksted”;

“An indefatigable volunteer who is especially appreciated for her selfless devotion in volunteering with the ACS Relay for Life”;

“Mentor to generations of young women through the Talented Teen and other organizations”;

“Lives for her family-especially her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and still has room for her close friends”.

Claire was there when we opened our first office and interacted with all of them- not just St. Croix, but also St. Thomas, St. John and DC. Her presence ensured harmony and helped to create the open, welcoming, office that we had – one that was reassuring to all who entered, that their issue or concern would be not only heard but addressed to the best of our ability.

At a recent Rotary West event Claire was directing everything - constantly on her feet, when I, younger and who had no previous fracture like she had, could barely walk. We watched her in awe – walking up and down, making sure it all ran smoothly, which, of course it did.

It is often said that if there is a difficult job to be done, give it to a woman, but in the VI, if there is a job that is not only difficult, but complex, and probably has to be done by creating something out of very little or nothing – give it to Claire and you will end up with a masterpiece!!! No one can beat Claire’s organizational skills- or her ability to engage people who are already oversubscribed, to help wherever, however or whenever needed. You just can’t tell Claire, “No”!

It was only natural that her most impactful service to us in the VI would take the path it did – with its origins being working with her husband in New York where she was immersed in the Black entertainment industry and on moving to St. Croix where it started in the complexities of travel: from Pan Am to her own travel agency

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So, the Department of Tourism was the natural place for her to land and to lead. Her tenure as director, assistant commissioner and then Commissioner of Tourism saw landmark events such as the unforgettable Folk Life Festival, magically and intimately connecting us in the Virgin Islands to our Senegalese family. But if a famous musical or screen artist was here, you can also bet that Claire's was a hand that made it happen. You know she had that hand in our music festivals.

There are so many things to thank or recognize Clare for, but none is more important than her mentoring of the countless young women who participated in Talented Teen and all the other contests. It was not just that these young women won local, national and international titles. Most significantly and enduringly, it was that they were able to develop their self-esteem, their self-confidence, to hone not only their talents but perfect themselves and it prepared them for life and success in their future endeavors. Many have gone on fulfilling careers, here and elsewhere. That is a remarkable legacy.

As Democratic National Committeewoman, I would be remiss if I did not also recognize and applaud her involvement and leadership in the Democratic Party - once serving as St. Croix District Chair, but being the backbone of many a successful campaign, including mine.

In Claire's own words:

My life here at home has afforded me the opportunity to be productive in many areas: Asst. Director of Tourism, Director of Tourism and Asst. Commissioner of Tourism, it has also given me the privilege to be involved with several organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Our Town Frederiksted, Frederiksted Economic Development Association, Women's Coalition, Girl Scouts of America, American Cancer Society (St. Croix Chapter), VIPR Friendship Committee, Virgin Islands Council on the Arts, V.I. Tourism Council, St. Croix Cruzan Christmas Festival Organization, Miss America Outstanding Teen Scholarship Competition and thirty-five (35) years with Hal Jackson's Virgin Islands Talented Teen, a Scholarship Competition and many more community organizations.

In all she freely gave of herself without cost or seeking acclaim or fame!

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Finally, as much as Claire has given to all of us, and how much we all love her, no one or no group has received more or loves her more than her family. All because of her unconditional love for each and everyone one of them – to the bone – or as folks say today: to the moon and back!

And Mrs Delta Jackson Dorsch could not have had a more devoted niece, better companion, loving caregiver and bearer of her her cultural legacy than Claire!

And because Claire has been all of the above and more, there is no more deserving person and no more fitting person to have their name grace the Visitor's center - a welcoming center to her beloved Frederiksted and AyAy!

Thank you, Madam Chair and members for the opportunity to testify and celebrate my friend Claire. Congratulations to everyone else who will be honored today.

Respectfully submitted,

*Donna M. Christensen*

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