

Glendia B. Caines

June 26, 2024

Hon. Carla J. Joseph
Chairperson
Committee on Government Operations,
Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Capitol Building
St. Thomas, VI 00802



Dear Senator Joseph:

Good morning, Senators, viewing and listening audience. On June 25, 2024, I, Glendia B. Caines, a retiree from the Judicial Branch of the Virgin Islands, received Senator Joseph's letter requesting that I provide testimony on Bill No. 35-0239, specifically as it relates to naming the visitors center at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility on St. Croix, to honor and commend Mrs. Claire L. Roker, with this facility being known thereafter as the Claire L. Roker Visitors Center. Congratulations Claire – what a great honor!

It is a pleasure for me to provide my support for this legislation, particularly in recognition of all the noteworthy work that Mrs. Roker has rendered to the Virgin Islands community, especially for and on behalf of her beloved home - the Big Island, St. Croix. Claire may not have coined the phrase: "Try a Virgin Island" or, "I love St. Croix", but the life she has lived and all of her community contributions, are testimonies of that love. There is no need for me to list all of the activities, organizations or events – including but not limited to politics, tourism, pageantry, economic development, mentorship, lifelong friendships, et. Al. - that Mrs. Roker has contributed to and or supported throughout her life, as they have all been astutely outlined within the body of this Bill.

Nevertheless, allow me to briefly share my interactions with Mrs. Roker which began in the late 80s, when I resided on St. Croix. There, I attended many of the Talented Teen shows – facilitated by Mrs. Roker and her dedicated staff of the Hal Jackson Talented Teen Scholarship Competition. Kudos to all! There, I fell in love with the quality and professionalism demonstrated in this local production; and those productions would serve me well in my later tenure with the Superior Court Rising Stars Youth Steel Orchestra where I utilized a variety of things I learned from just sitting in the audience. Unbelievable as it may sound, during the years I spent on St. Croix, I never met Mrs. Roker. We met in early 1991, when I returned home to St. Thomas from the Mainland, to work at the Department of Economic Development and Agriculture (ED&A). We bonded and became lifelong friends, best buds, comardo, therapist, ace boon coons and so much more.

Under the leadership and guidance of the late Hon. Commissioner Eric E. Dawson and his male dominated Agriculture staff, his strategic leadership team at ED&A was comprised of a plethora of women – all with various backgrounds – management, tourism, accounting, etc. They included Director of Tourism/Assistant Commissioner Mrs. Leona Bryant, Assistant Director/Director/Assistant Commissioner Mrs. Claire L. Roker, Business Office Managers Mrs. Jane John and Mrs. Eleanor Garcia, Secretaries Ellen Benjamin and Vivian Lewis and I, Glendia B. Caines - his Executive Assistant. This team would receive their marching orders from the Commissioner and proceeded to "figure out" how to support and accomplish his vision within the given time frame.

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We all know that Mrs. Roker has been a driving force within the public and private sector of the US Virgin Islands' tourism industry. She has been an integral part of and/or spearheaded numerous activities and events that fostered economic growth and development, provided positive and productive marketing strategies, cultivated business opportunities, and supported numerous cultural events and enhancements for our Territory, just to name a few. During her tenure at ED&A, Claire worked cohesively with our public relations office and especially our advertising agency, Greengage and Associates, headed by the awesome Richard Ferrelli. The planning and execution of initiatives had her and the team working hard and, in the end, left them satisfied and playing hard (if and when time permitted). During her travels from St. Croix to St. Thomas, there was no time to play around, as there were lots of meetings. Even during the team's standing lunch dates at the Chinese restaurant or Gladly Cafe, the lunch hour became working lunches where brainstorming and details were streamlined to ensure the completion of assignments – foreign, domestic or Territorial - within or in advance of the timeframe outlined by the Commissioner.

In her various capacities within Tourism, Mrs. Roker was directly responsible for the operations of the then five (5) offshore offices that were managed by dedicated professional Virgin Islanders. These individuals loved and passionately promoted their beloved Virgin Islands: Ludvig Harrigan in California; Jennifer Rodriguez followed by Barbara Petersen in Chicago; Rafael "Raffie" Jackson in New York and the Tri-State area; Gail L. Francis in Miami; and Flora Boynes Spencer in Washington, DC. The dedication, commitment and respect, for promoting the Territory, which was exhibited by Commissioner Dawson, Mrs. Bryant, Mrs. Roker and her managers enabled the Virgin Islands to set marketing and advertising standards that were emulated by many destinations, especially within the Caribbean Region. They also greatly contributed to the record-breaking number of visitors to the Territory during that era. To date, we have not seen a "servant leaders" team such as this within any governmental organization - never imitated and definitely cannot be duplicated.

The outstanding information contained in Bill No. 35-0239, eminently qualifies Mrs. Claire Lorraine Brown Roker to be the recipient of this "lifetime achievement award". Thus, it is also my fervent recommendation that with the naming of this facility in honor of our esteemed Claire L. Roker, funds must be appropriated (line itemed if necessary), within the respective agency's annual budget, to ensure the requisite maintenance, decoration and upkeep of this very important facility within our tourism and community infrastructure.

Therefore, without any reservations, and also taking this opportunity to speak on behalf of our deceased ED&A co-workers and agency associate, which includes Commissioner Eric E. Dawson, Assistant Commissioner Larry Bough, Deputy Commissioner Colville "Bapo" Lewis, Business Managers Jane A. John and Eleanor Garcia; Offshore Office Managers Ludvig Harrigan, Raphael "Raffie" Jackson, Flora Boynes Spencer, Gail L. Francis and Greengage and Associates President, Richard Ferrelli, who I'm sure are all proud of this initiative, I, Glendia B. Caines, hereby offer our full and unwavering support of Bill No. 35-0239 to honor and commend Claire Lorraine Brown Roker by naming the visitors center at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility on St. Croix the Claire L. Roker Visitors Center. Thank you, Senators, for giving Claire her flowers while she can appreciate their fragrance!

Sincerely,



Glendia B. Caines

Judicial Branch Retiree