

**HONORING JUDGE VERNE A. HODGE, CHIEF JUDGE EMERITUS**

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2024**

**PROTOCOL HAVING BEEN ESTABLISHED, GOOD MORNING EVERYONE!**

**THIS IS INDEED THE DAY THAT THE LORD HAS MADE. YES, THIS TRIUMPHANT TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2024 HAS BEEN VERY LONG IN THE MAKING AND I CAN EMPHATICALLY SAY THAT THIS AUSPICIOUS OCCASION IS “PURE JOY UNSPEAKABLE” AND AN EMOTIONAL ONE FOR ME. I AM ALSO WELL AWARE THAT MY SENTIMENTS ARE EQUALLY SHARED WITH THE ENTIRE HODGE FAMILY, GUESTS AND DIGNITARIES PRESENT, THE THIRTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE, THE JUDICIAL FAMILY, THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH, THE TERRITORY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS, THE CARIBBEAN, THOSE LOCATED AND RESIDING ON THE MAINLAND AND ANYONE WHO HAS EVER HAD THE PRIVILEGE AND/OR OPPORTUNITY TO MEET, WORK FOR, WORK OR BE ASSOCIATED WITH, THE “MAN OF THE HOUR”, JUDGE VERNE ANTONIO HODGE, CHIEF JUDGE EMERITUS OF THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS.**

**BECAUSE OF THE LIMITED TIME ALOTTED FOR MY REMARKS THIS MORNING, I WILL ATTEMPT TO BRIEFLY ADDRESS JUST A FEW OF THE MANY REASONS I KNOW, “WITHOUT A SHAWDOW OF A DOUBT”, THAT JUDGE HODGE, ( WHOM I SOMETIME REFER TO AS “ CHIEF”), IS MORE THAN QUALIFIED AND UNDENIABLY DESERVANT OF THIS MOST PRESTIGIOUS TRIBUTE TO BE PRESENTED TO HIM TODAY.**

**IN MY INTRODUCTION THIS MORNING, YOU MAY HAVE HEARD ME SAY: “ TODAY HAS BEEN A LONG TIME IN THE MAKING”. WELL, I SAID THAT, NOT BECAUSE THERE**

HASN'T BEEN COUNTLESS EFFORTS AND ATTEMPTS BY INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TO PAY HOMAGE TO THIS EXTRAORDINARY JURIST, TRAILBLAZER, HUMANITARIAN, VISIONARY, LEADER AND FRIEND. BUT RATHER, THE DELAY HAS BEEN CAUSED BY JUDGE HODGE'S GENUINE HUMILITY AND AVERSION TO PUBLIC RECOGNITION. IRONICALLY, IT IS JUST THAT, WHICH MAKES HIM EVEN THE MORE ENDEARING, ADMIRED, RESPECTED AND LOVED.

IN THE FIFTY (50) YEARS THAT I HAVE HAD THE HONOR AND PRIVILEGE OF KNOWING JUDGE HODGE, I HAVE NEVER WITNESSED, NOT EVEN A HINT OF "SELF AGGRANDIZEMENT" OR SELF PRIDE, ON HIS BEHALF. INSTEAD I HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN HIM TO BE TOTALLY SELFLESS; PREOCCUPIED AND ABSORBED WITH HELPING THE DISINFRANCHISED, THE DISADVANTAGED, THE FORGOTTEN, THOSE WHO WERE IN NEED OF A SECOND CHANCE IN LIFE OR THOSE WHO WERE IN NEED OF SOMEONE TO "HOLD THE DOOR OF OPPORTUNITY OPEN", SO DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS COULD BE REALIZED OR PLACED WITHIN THEIR REACH. THIS IS WHERE THE JUDGE'S COMFORT ZONE, HIS HEART AND HIS TIRELESS EFFORTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PLACED. AND SO I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE "PULLING AND TUGGING", THE "CONJOLING", "COAXING" AND MAYBE EVEN A LITTLE LOVING "ARM TWISTING" EXERCISED BY JUDGE HODGE'S THREE CHILDREN AND GRANDS, WHOM HE ABSOLUTELY ADORES, TO FINALLY PERSUADE HIM THAT A GRATEFUL COMMUNITY AND TERRITORY SIMPLY CAN NOT WAIT, NOT EVEN ONE DAY MORE, TO EXPRESS THEIR OVERWHELMING GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION TO HIM, BY TANGIBLY MEMORIALIZING HIS UNPARALLELED LEGACY, IN THE FORM OF RENAMING THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS, ST. THOMAS AND ST. JOHN DISTRICT "THE JUDGE VERNE A. HODGE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS."

**WHILE THERE IS SO MUCH TO BE SAID ABOUT THE OVERWHELMING NUMBER OF NOTEWORTHY PROJECTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS, INITIATED BY AND CARRIED TO FRUITION BY JUDGE HODGE, THERE IS SO LITTLE TIME TO GO INTO DETAIL. HOWEVER, TODAY'S CELEBRATION WOULD NOT BE COMPLETE, IF MENTION WAS NOT MADE OF THE INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED AND CELEBRATED " RISING STARS YOUTH STEEL ORCHESTRA", HIS "BRAIN CHILD" AND HIS "BABY",**

**AS A VISIONARY AND LEADER, JUDGE HODGE WAS NOT ONLY A PHENOMENAL ADMINISTRATOR, FIRST IN THE THEN DEPARTMENT OF LAW, AS THE ATTORNEY GENERAL AND LATER AS THE PRESIDING JUDGE OF THE JUDICIAL BRANCH, BUT HE WAS, AND STILL IS, AN OUTSTANDING JURIST, WHO CARED DEEPLY ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THOSE ENTERING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, PARTICULARLY JUVENILES. SO WHEN "THE CHIEF" NOTED THE INCREASING NUMBER AND FREQUENCIES OF JUVENILES APPEARING BEFORE HIM FOR DELINQUENCY, HE DECIDED IN 1981 TO TAKE A PROACTIVE APPROACH, GUIDED BY THE ADAGE" AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE". SO IN CHANGING THE COURSE OF THOSE YOUTH AND ANY OTHER YOUTH WHO COULD BE POTENTIALLY "AT RISK", A SUMMER EXPERIMENTAL STEEL DRUM PROGRAM IN THE DISTRICT OF ST. THOMAS AND ST. JOHN WAS INITIATED. THE PROGRAM WAS SO PROMISING, IT LATER BECAME A YEAR ROUND, FULLY STAFFED PROGRAM, WITH INSTRUCTORS, TUTORS, RULES AND REGULATIONS AND MANY INCENTIVES FOR THE YOUTH TO CONTINUE IN SCHOOL AND DO WELL. THE GUIDING AND INSPIRATIONAL MOTTO OF THE PROGRAM WAS: "NOTHING IS SO COMPLICATED THAT IT CANNOT BE SIMPLIFIED BY HARD WORK". BECAUSE OF IT OVERWHELMING SUCCESS, IT WAS LATER EXPANDED TO ST. CROIX IN 2006 AND THE REST IS HISTORY.**

IN CLOSING, I FIND IT A DAUNTING, IF NOT AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK TO ADEQUATELY EXPRESS MY PERSONAL GRATITUDE TO JUDGE HODGE FOR INITIALLY HIRING ME, "SIGHT UNSEEN", IN 1974, AS ONE OF HIS ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERALS; FOR SENDING ME TO TRAINING, SO MY LEGAL SKILLS COULD BE SHARPENED; FOR MENTORING ME; FOR ALWAYS BEING AVAILABLE TO BRAINSTORM WITH ME WHENEVER SOME CONUNDRUM WOULD SURFACE, DESPITE HIS UNENDING HERCULEAN TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES; FOR ENCOURAGING ME IN ALL MY ENDEAVORS; FOR BEING MY GUIDING AND CONSTANT ROLE MODEL; FOR TEACHING ME BY EXAMPLE, THE ADAGE: "PEOPLE DON'T CARE HOW MUCH YOU KNOW UNTIL THEY KNOW HOW MUCH YOU CARE"; FOR HELPING ME REALIZE MY DREAMS AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS; FOR ALWAYS BELIEVING IN ME; FOR BEING THE "BIG" BROTHER, I NEVER HAD; AND SO MUCH MORE. SO SUFFICE TO SAY THAT I THANK GOD FOR EVERY REMEMBRANCE OF YOU JUDGE. AND MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY ABUNDANTLY! CONGRATULATIONS "CHIEF"!

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

BRENDA J. HOLLAR