

Resolution Honoring Senator Mike Crapo

Mr. Chairman Potter, members of the subcommittee, distinguished guests, and friends:

It is an extraordinary honor to speak today in recognition of Senator Mike Crapo and his long-standing service, support, and commitment to the people of the Virgin Islands.

In February 2005, Governor Charles Turnbull asked me to assist in a last-ditch effort to stop Senate action on a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) bill that had passed the House unanimously and was on the Senate fast-track calendar. Its passage would have severely constrained our economic flexibility at a critical moment, just as the recently passed Jobs Act had blindsided many Virgin Islanders.

Recognizing the gravity of the moment, I persuaded Senator Jim Talent to travel with me to the Virgin Islands to see the situation firsthand and meet with the people affected by these policies. Within a week, we were on the ground, and what we saw amazed us. The Territory was poised for real, exponential growth. Senator Talent remarked that the Virgin Islands was on the verge of achieving the American Dream. He recognized immediately that the CFO bill was misplaced and that attacks on the EDC program were badly timed.

Standing right here in the Territory, Senator Talent showed me the power of a United States Senator. With a single phone call, he stopped the CFO bill. But he didn't stop there. He turned to his friend, Senator Mike Crapo, and encouraged him to learn more about the Virgin Islands.

A month later, Senator Crapo came to the Virgin Islands with me. Senator Talent had shown me the power of a Senator's voice. Senator Mike Crapo showed me the power of a Senator's heart. He listened to our people, he saw our progress, and he used his influence not for politics, but for fairness and justice.

During that visit, after understanding the tremendous risk we faced — including the potential collapse of our economy due to IRS actions and changes in the EDC program — Senator Crapo told Governor Turnbull, in a room filled with Virgin Islands business leaders and community stakeholders: "I will be your Senator — because you don't have one." That moment marked the beginning of a partnership that has shaped the Territory's modern economic success.

Because of Senator Crapo and our other friends in the Senate, the Virgin Islands was no longer treated with disdain by federal bureaucrats; instead, our concerns were taken seriously, our calls were returned, and our issues were addressed with a new level of respect.

Senator Crapo has kept his promise. Since 2005, he has been our most important voice in Washington. He stood side by side with Senators Orrin Hatch and Jay Rockefeller in defeating efforts by Puerto Rico

and the Obama Administration to scuttle the Captain Morgan Distillery — preserving one of the most critical pillars of our economy. Quite frankly, we would not have survived the closure of HOVENSA without Captain Morgan.

During Senator Rockefeller's first visit to the Virgin Islands in thirty-five years, he forcefully castigated the Federal Aviation Administration for its decade-long refusal to provide special funding for the Cyril E. King Airport — a ban rooted in the unresolved issue of the Anguilla landfill on St. Croix. His intervention had an immediate impact: the FAA restored funding for St. Thomas almost at once. By the following year, the Acting Director of the Virgin Islands Port Authority reported that the airport had achieved a new record in federal funding, a direct result of Senator Rockefeller's advocacy.

Similarly, the National Park Service — which had previously testified that it would never return land for the construction of a public school on St. John — reversed its position and offered 25 acres in Catherineberg as a potential site.

And when U.S. Customs walked away from negotiations over the return of fees collected at the Virgin Islands airports, refusing to continue discussions, everything changed when Senator Orrin Hatch became Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. He pledged legislation to grant all of those funds to the Territory. His commitment brought Customs back to the table and reopened the negotiations — another demonstration of how Senate leadership reshaped federal attitudes toward the Virgin Islands.

Most recently, Senator Crapo achieved something few believed possible: he authored the provision that made our rum tax cover-over permanently part of United States law. For decades, this revenue had been treated as temporary — extended in short increments and subject to political debate and uncertainty. Senator Crapo ended that uncertainty, giving the Virgin Islands a predictable revenue base and the ability to plan for our future with confidence.

Over the past twenty years, Senator Crapo has made himself consistently available to every Virgin Islands Governor. He has earned the trust and respect of our leaders by listening, engaging, and acting on our priorities. Today, he serves as co-chairman of the Virgin Islands Caucus, alongside Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, and remains committed to working with us on any initiative that strengthens the Virgin Islands economy and improves the quality of life for all our residents.

The Virgin Islands has also been well represented by outstanding delegates and leaders over the years. Delegates Stacey Plaskett and Donna Christensen have been remarkable advocates; without their tireless efforts, many of our achievements would not have been possible. Each Virgin Islands Governor has represented the Territory in Washington with distinction. Particularly in recent years, the Office of the Governor has been led by a real fighter and tenacious advocate: Teri Helenese. She kept the rum tax issue alive when many had given up and encouraged the Governor to restore my role after I had been sidelined by illness, ensuring continuity in critical advocacy work.

Since the launch of our Congressional Outreach Program, the Virgin Islands has hosted over 40 congressional visits to the Territory, two Virgin Islands Days in Washington, and two major Alexander

Hamilton Award events in the Capitol. Through these efforts, we have achieved significant legislative victories, including the Six Pack rules, the Alexander Hamilton Boyhood Home Act, important provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act, the increased Medicaid match in 2018, Hurricane Maria and Irma funding, Opportunity Zone designation, the 2017 Senate Tax Reform Bill, the Budget Reform Act of 2018, and, most recently, the permanent rum tax provision in what I like to call the "Big Beautiful Bill."

Over the years, I have brought key congressional leaders to the Virgin Islands to see our needs firsthand: Mitch McConnell nine times, Orrin Hatch ten times, and Charlie Rangel twelve times. So when Hurricanes Irma and Maria struck, the difference in how the Virgin Islands was treated compared to Puerto Rico was stark. I commend Governor Bryan for ensuring the flow of funds continued to the Territory. The \$24 billion in disaster relief and recovery funds was not the result of magic or luck — it was the result of consistent advocacy, preparation, and effective leadership.

Senator Crapo himself has visited the Virgin Islands only twice, but I have visited him in Idaho every year for the past twenty years and attended nearly all of his special events. Over that time, the Virgin Islands has become known in the Senate as a special concern of his. His consistent attention, guidance, and advocacy have made an extraordinary difference for our Territory.

Back in 2008, during one of our weekly meetings in his office, Senator Orrin Hatch offered me a deal. He said that if I promised not to represent any clients other than the Virgin Islands, his office would always be open to our concerns. I accepted the deal and ended all my other client relationships. It was a huge financial sacrifice, but having Orrin Hatch in our corner meant we would also have the support of Senators Mike Crapo and Mitch McConnell. It was a sacrifice worth making.

Many Virgin Islanders do not know who I am. I have intentionally kept myself out of the limelight, believing that my effectiveness is greatest when the attention is focused on the leaders I serve, not on me. Yet for more than three decades, I have worked on behalf of the Virgin Islands — first as Chief of Staff to Governor Roy Schneider, and later as the Washington representative for Governors Turnbull, de Jongh, Mapp, and Governor Bryan.

Before dedicating my full attention to the Virgin Islands, my professional life was centered on Africa. I served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and later as Vice President of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation under President George H. W. Bush. I was also the first Washington lobbyist for President John Kufuor of Ghana and represented several other African governments as well as Fortune 50 corporations.

I was never made whole financially, but there has been no greater privilege than being able to serve the Virgin Islands and help establish us as a real, respected presence in Congress. Thank you for allowing me the honor of serving our people.

Now is the time for the Virgin Islands Legislature to play an even bigger role in our advocacy efforts in Washington. I hope that this Resolution honoring Senator Crapo inspires the Legislature to adopt this

recognition and to consider additional ways that the entire Virgin Islands government can work together to be more effective advocates for our Territory. The challenges and opportunities before us demand nothing less than a unified, strategic approach.

Mr. Chairman Potter, members of the subcommittee, distinguished guests: The story I have shared illustrates the extraordinary impact that one committed leader can have when paired with a Territory ready to act. Senator Mike Crapo's integrity, diligence, and steadfast support have left an indelible mark on the Virgin Islands.

For these reasons — and countless others — we proudly offer this Resolution Honoring Senator Mike Crapo.

Thank you.