

Good afternoon to the honorable members of the 36th Legislature, distinguished guests, family, friends, and the woman of the hour, Rashida A. Hodge.

Before I continue, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the Honorable Senator Uncle Dwayne DeGraff and my Honorable Aunt Karen Hodge, because today is also your moment.

Rashida Hodge is my first cousin, but more akin to a sister. And while many of you know her as a successful technology executive, philanthropist, and trailblazer, our family has the privilege of knowing her simply as Rash.

There is something special about being asked to speak about your personal hero, mentor, and one of your greatest inspirations. Because when you know someone that well, you don't just see the highlight reels. You know the sacrifices, the struggles, and the low seasons that created the triumphs we celebrate today.

During my third year of law school, and her first year of business school at Duke, I actually lived with Rashida. I had a front-row seat to how she does life.

And what I witnessed was an extraordinary work ethic. Mostly because I barely saw her!

She left for work before six in the morning and rarely returned before midnight. Between her full-time career at IBM, business school, study groups, and constant travel, her life was a masterclass in discipline.

Rashida understood that ambition without discipline is merely a wish. Someone who leans into hard work because excellence demands consistency. Like an elite athlete, she embraces the boring, rigorous, repetitive work that forges greatness.

And as I've gotten older, I've realized that I'd seen that same determination somewhere before.

In our grandmother, Ioline Hodge...Grandma Muddy.

I submit to you that Rashida is the living personification of our grandmother, had Muddy been given the educational opportunities afforded to her grandchildren.

Because Muddy was a force.

Our grandmother spent her life as a housekeeper and nanny, doing work society too often overlooks and undervalues. Yet, with those wages, she purchased her own home and raised six children, many of whom pursued university and graduate education.

She never sat in a corporate boardroom or carried an impressive title. But she possessed determination, faith, and an unwavering belief that what she could not achieve for herself, she could make possible for those who came after her.

And that, to me, is the remarkable story of Rashida Hodge.

Today, we celebrate a woman whose influence extends far beyond her native Savan and far beyond the shores of these beautiful islands. Islands whose names remain on her lips, whose culture is tattooed on her heart, and whose story she carries worldwide.

Because as impressive as her résumé is, perhaps her greatest achievement is her insatiable generosity.

She honors her history through philanthropy. Rashida's giving is sacrificial and unending. And she'll probably be embarrassed by this, but people don't know about the secret tuition she pays, the debts she clears, or the opportunities she creates. She gives freely of her time, knowledge, and expertise.

To make it plain—Rashida puts people on.

And in 2024, she established a one-million-dollar scholarship fund for Virgin Islands students to attend her alma mater, North Carolina State University.

A scholarship named in honor of our grandmother, Ioline Hodge.

Think about the beautiful symmetry of that.

Our grandmother worked so her children could receive an education.

And now her granddaughter is ensuring that other people's children can receive one too.

What began with a housekeeper's wages has become a million-dollar investment in the future of Virgin Islands children.

That is generational transformation.

And Rashida's life has acted as that transformation for so many others as she teaches others how to live fully.

Anyone that has watched her has learned that success requires sacrifice, that opportunity is always tethered to responsibility, and that true accomplishment is measured not simply by how far you travel, but by how many people you help along the way.

We honor your insatiable curiosity, your courage to reinvent yourself, your resilience in the face of adversity, and your astonishing ability to balance relentless ambition with genuine warmth, compassion, and love.

Today, as the Legislature honors you, I hope you understand that this recognition celebrates more than your professional achievements.

It celebrates the values of a family, the sacrifices of a grandmother, and the extraordinary possibilities that emerge when one generation becomes a stepping stool for the next.

Our grandmother built a foundation.

And Rashida, you are living proof of just how strong that foundation was.

I can think of no greater tribute to her, or more fitting reason to celebrate you today.

Congratulations, Rashida. We love you, we are proud of you, and we thank you for reminding us that the greatest measure of success is not simply what we achieve, but what we make possible for others.

From the President of the Rashida Hodge Fan Club.