

I am honored and privileged to be asked to testify in support of Bill 36-0229 an act honoring and commending Senator Adelbert “Bert” Bryan for his outstanding contributions and dedicated service to the Virgin Islands community, particularly on the island of St. Croix and to ceremoniously name Queen Street Frederiksted, St. Croix in his honor as Adelbert “Bert” Bryan Drive.

I can’t begin to fully recite Senator Bryan’s contributions to the Virgin Islands and more particularly to the island of St. Croix. Those contributions, in my opinion, are too numerous and can and will be recited by others. History, if written accurately, shall certainly record them. I will, nonetheless, offer certain adjectives that I feel best describe those contributions: impactful; historical; revolutionary; forward thinking; progressive; courageous; unfearing. And I would add two more: controversial and radical.

History has demonstrated that when an individual takes on the established system, the established societal and economic order; when that individual speaks to the right of the majority of the people to be in control of and to determine their own destiny, those in who benefit from the established system, the status quo, are logically threatened. Think about it: who would want to give up power and privilege?

Adelbert Bryan was unafraid to challenge the status quo. And often, those challenges were due to the failure of the government to do right by the common people. In a 1977 Third Circuit court case Adelbert M. Bryan v. Alphonso A. Christian, Bryan, then a Virgin Islands police officer, challenged the Department of Public Safety’s refusal to promote him to police sergeant. His tenure as senator in the Legislature of Virgin Islands follow the same theme. Adelbert Bryan was integrally involved in litigation that challenged the Department of Education and the then Commissioner of Educational Charles Turnbull over infrastructural problems at the St. Croix Central High School that ranged from leaking roofs to unsanitary conditions to structurally deficient buildings. His 1983, bill that became Act 4844 mandated the teaching of Virgin Islands History and basic Caribbean History to all students. He was also a plaintiff in a relatively recent court case to force the Department of Education and the Board of Education to fully implement the mandates of the same act.

Senator Adelbert Bryan was always known for championing issues of importance to the common people. In 1986, he ran for Governor of the Virgin Islands under the banner of the Independent Citizens Movement, a home grown political party. His campaign for governor was in driven, in large part, on the strength of issues important to the common people. A November 5, 1986 United Press International report issued immediately after Bryan reached the runoff with former Governor Farrelly, stated that Bryan advocated more populist positions that had caused apprehension

among some. A 1986 Los Angeles Times account of his campaign described Bryan as campaigning around the theme of Virgin Islanders being neglected in their own homeland. The article reported that his support was concentrated particularly in poorer districts and quoted him advocating greater emphasis on low-and middle-income housing, increased hotel taxation, and use of resulting revenues for education and public health. The newspaper report placed Bryan's politics within a broader Crucian and Virgin Islands tradition concerned with promoting greater local political power, addressing economic inequality, land and development, and the position of Native Virgin Islanders within the territory. The Los Angeles report described Bryan's 1986 campaign theme as Virgin Islanders being "forgotten in their own homeland." The article placed those positions within the context of broader tensions involving mainland investment, rapidly rising land prices, lack of employment opportunities for Native Virgin Islanders, condominium development, race and economic displacement of Virgin Islanders.

I worked as a staffer in the Office of Senator Bryan when he sponsored the Virgin Islands Casino and Resort Control Act of 1995. Within the act was contained a definition of Native Virgin Islander. Such a definition had never before been included in the Virgin Islands Code. It was made part of the act for the purpose of identifying individuals that could qualify for certain classifications of casino hotel licensure reserved for Native Virgin Islanders. It was, as much, an attempt by Native Virgin Islanders to define ourselves as is done by other people. It was both radical and controversial. It was met with great pushback from those who felt excluded and from some who felt we had no right to self-define. It in essence was a measure aimed at economic empowerment for the people of these islands. It was also an act of self-determination. Thus, it is documented Adelbert Bryan represented a strain of Virgin Islands politics emphasizing native political and economic empowerment, greater self-determination and criticism of established economic arrangements that did not benefit Virgin Islands people.

Those established economic arrangements were quite evident in 1841, where, for example, the Danish colonial government on St. Croix maintained documented separate classifications for people living on Queen Street, Frederiksted. Queen Street, historically one of Frederiksted's principal streets, is where Adelbert Bryan was raised. Before July 3, 1848, Danish colonial census records classified residents of Queen Street according to whether they were free or legally enslaved demonstrating that the established economic arrangement, the institution of slavery, was embedded within the social and residential fabric of the town itself.

After July 3, 1848, that legal distinction could no longer exist. Queen Street can therefore be used as an example to tell the emancipation story at the human scale—not merely talking about governors, forts and emancipation proclamations, but about households, families and individual common people, some classified as mere chattel. It is the story of Crucians whose legal status changed through the struggle for the human rights of the common people.

And we all know that Frederiksted was the central physical stage upon which enslaved Crucians, in 1848, confronted colonial authority, the oppressive established economic arrangement, and attained physical freedom for all Virgin Islanders. And it did not stop there. During the 1878 Firebun, formerly enslaved people and their descendants, still suffering under slave-like established economic conditions again converged upon Frederiksted, including Queen Street, in a struggle over the economic and labor conditions that survived slavery.

Thus, Queen Street, Frederiksted constitutes an important component of Frederiksted's and the Virgin Islands' landscape of emancipation and freedom. Queen Street's significance lies in its documented connection to the common people who experienced slavery and physical freedom, and in its location within the Frederiksted landscape where those struggles repeatedly came to a head. It is within this historical landscape of struggle for the rights of the common people and challenge to the status quo, that Adelbert Bryan and his contributions must be viewed. Adelbert Bryan is a son of Queen Street, Frederiksted and I think he was imbued, within his social DNA, with the struggle for the human right of economic empowerment and self determination.

The struggle for a new societal and economic order, for the right of our people to determine our own destiny is not complete. I don't believe that the struggles of our forefathers and foremothers was simply aimed at replacing one colonial massa for another. I sincerely believe that Adelbert Bryan should be viewed as another of our historical actors in the ongoing struggle for the economic empowerment of Virgin Islanders within the wider struggle for self-determination. And I know that this Act honoring and commending Adelbert "Bert" Bryan for his outstanding contributions and dedicated service and to ceremoniously name Queen Street in Frederiksted in his honor is totally justified, warranted and appropriate.