

113TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. CON. RES. 38

Recognizing and celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Virgin Islands becoming a part of the United States.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 22, 2013

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, and in addition to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Recognizing and celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Virgin Islands becoming a part of the United States.

Whereas on March 31, 2017, the United States Virgin Islands will celebrate 100 years of being a part of the United States family, having been purchased from Denmark for \$25,000,000 for strategic reasons, one of which was the defense of the Panama Canal;

Whereas the United States Virgin Islands will use this anniversary to commemorate its history, culture, and diversity;

Whereas one of the earliest historical accounts of the Virgin Islands begins with its aboriginal inhabitants on St.

Croix who engaged Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the New World in 1493;

Whereas the 3 largest Virgin Islands, particularly St. Croix, were ruled by 7 flags over the 500-year history;

Whereas Denmark began acquiring the islands that were to become known as the Danish West Indies with the founding of its first permanent colony on the island of St. Thomas in 1665, to be followed by the island of St. John in 1717, and the island of St. Croix in 1733;

Whereas in a 250-year span of history, Denmark colonized the 3 islands as a part of the sugar trade which included participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and a plantation-based system which continued until the 1848 slave rebellion and emancipation;

Whereas the decline of the sugar industry in the Virgin Islands led to Denmark seeking a buyer for the Danish West Indies;

Whereas the United States seeking a strategic base to protect its assets in the Caribbean, to include the newly built Panama Canal, purchased the Danish West Indies for \$25,000,000 in gold, through the Treaty of Cession of 1917, which confirmed that the civil rights and political status of the inhabitants of the islands would be determined by the United States Congress;

Whereas the transfer of the Danish West Indies to the United States took place on March 31, 1917, with ceremonies on St. Thomas and St. Croix and this ceremony is commemorated yearly in the now United States Virgin Islands as “Transfer Day”;

Whereas the people of the United States Virgin Islands are descendants of the European colonizers, the enslaved Af-

ricans, the aboriginal inhabitants, and people from all over the world, most notably, Puerto Rico, the wider Caribbean, South America, and the United States;

Whereas the Virgin Islands history with the United States began as early as the American Revolution when St. Croix-bred Alexander Hamilton rose to become one of the leaders of the revolution and the first Secretary of the Treasury of the United States;

Whereas St. Croix plantation owner Abraham Markoe was a financier of the American Revolution, and designed the Philadelphia Light Horse Calvary's flag, which may have served as the pattern for the 13 stripes in the present American flag;

Whereas the Danish Fort in Frederiksted was the first military institution to salute the new United States colors, recognizing the independence of the 13 former British colonies;

Whereas since the Transfer in 1917, the people of the United States Virgin Islands, have made significant contributions to the United States, including—

(1) Alonzo G. Moron, President of Hampton University from 1949 to 1959;

(2) Alton A. Adams, musician and first Black bandmaster of the United States Navy;

(3) Arthur A. Schomburg, bibliophile, historian, curator, and activist who researched and raised awareness of the great contributions that African-Latin Americans and African-Americans have made to society, was known as the “Father of Black History”, and his collection of literature and art is now part of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library in Harlem;

(4) Ashley L. Totten, organizer and officer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the leader of the American Virgin Islands Civic and Industrial Association of New York;

(5) Camille Pissaro, artist, french impressionist painter, born on St. Thomas of Jewish lineage where a royal ordinance made public in Denmark in 1814, protected and liberated Jews;

(6) Casper Holstein, humanitarian and philanthropist, dedicated his efforts to advocating for improving the standard of living for Virgin Islanders and a greater degree of self-government to the islands;

(7) Claude A. “Bennie” Benjamin, musician, composer, and entertainer who composed musical themes for several Walt Disney movies;

(8) Edward Wilmot Blyden, intellectual, educator, linguist, clergyman, author, statesman, college president and father of Pan-Africanism;

(9) Honorable Melvin H. Evans, first elected Governor of the United States Virgin Islands and Ambassador to Trinidad & Tobago;

(10) Honorable Ron de Lugo, first Delegate to Congress of the United States Virgin Islands, served 40 years in public service, locally and nationally, fought to increase the rights and privileges for territorial delegates, while working for the full political status of the Virgin Islands, and served as the chairman of the subcommittee on Insular and International Affairs;

(11) Honorable Terence A. Todman, career Ambassador served the United States across the globe for almost 50 years and has received the Presidential Distinguished Service Award, the National Public Service Award, the Department of State’s Superior Service

Honor Award, Director General's Cup, and the Secretary of State's Distinguished Service Award, in addition being decorated by the Governments of Argentina, Denmark, Spain, Chad, and the United States Virgin Islands;

(12) Hubert H. Harrison, writer, teacher orator, editor, labor leader, and "Renaissance Man";

(13) J. Raymond Jones, politician, power broker, and Tammany Hall Chief;

(14) Morris Simmonds, studied in Germany at the universities at Turbingen, Leipzig, Munster, and Kiel, received his medical degree, specialized in pathology, and after his death, had a disease of the pituitary gland, "Simmonds Disease", named after him;

(15) Nella Larsen, one of the most influential novelists of the Harlem Renaissance;

(16) Sosthenese Behn, soldier, industrialist, business innovator, and founder of the International Telephone and Telegraph Company; and

(17) William Leidesdorff, free Black from St. Croix, sea captain, merchant, trader, land owner, civic leader, early California pioneer, and regarded as the first Black millionaire in the United States;

Whereas Virgin Islanders such as Calvin Pickering, Elrod Hendricks, Emile Griffith, Horace Clarke, Joe Christopher, Julian Jackson, Kelsey Grammer, Kevin Krigger, Midre Cummings, Raja Bell, Saba Johnson, Tim Duncan, United States Diplomat Ullmont L. James, Sr., Victor Lebron, and others have made substantial contributions to government, sports, and the arts in the United States;

Whereas the mission for self-determination and constitutional reform continues today;

Whereas between 1924 and 1927, several proposed bills for constitutional reform were discussed by congressional committees on insular affairs, though immediate action didn't manifest until the creation of the first Organic Act of 1936 and then subsequently with the Revised Organic Act of 1954;

Whereas the Organic Act of 1936 passed as a result of efforts by David Hamilton Jackson and Rothschild Francis, along with others including Casper Holstein and Ashley Totten, allowing for increased self-government, both this and the Revised Organic Act of 1954 intended to promote the growing political consciousness of Virgin Islanders and to achieve greater economy and efficiency of government, providing the legal base for the political and administrative re-organization of the Virgin Islands;

Whereas this was furthered strengthened report of the 1964 to 1965 Constitutional Convention Report which recommended an elective governor and lieutenant governor, the continuation of existing representation, a Resident Commissioner or delegate to the United States House of Representatives, and the right of Virgin Islanders to vote in national elections for the President and Vice President of the United States;

Whereas while efforts in governance continued to evolve over the course of history, it is also important to document social and economic reforms as well;

Whereas after the transfer, the Virgin Islands were administered by the United States Navy and with it came an improved system of social services and higher paying jobs associated with military buildup, and later the civil administration sought to develop the economy through the

establishment of homesteading to promote agricultural production;

Whereas after the end of prohibition, rum production flourished and continues today, though agricultural efforts witnessed a decline;

Whereas in its place, tourism emerged as a major economic driver, experiencing substantial growth in the 1950s and 1960s along with investment in watch assembly operations, oil refining, and bauxite processing;

Whereas the material and cultural heritage, in the music of Quelbe, the dance of Quadrille, and in the preserved architecture which was engendered during Danish rule has manifested under United States rule and has added a dynamic addition to the Nation's story;

Whereas the people of the Virgin Islands have a shared historical, cultural, and genetic inheritance linking them to Africa, Puerto Rico, the wider Caribbean, Denmark, and the United States;

Whereas significant hardships were endured by the enslaved Africans during the period of European colonial rule, which precipitated the 1733 revolution on St. John, the successful 1848 Emancipation Insurrection, signed by Danish Governor Peter von Scholten, the 1878 Fireburn on St. Croix, and the 1892 Coal Workers' Strike on St. Thomas;

Whereas by the spirit of resistance, insurrection, and militancy, enslaved African heroes like General Buddhoe, Anna Hegaard, Queens Mary, Agnes, Matilda, "Bottom Belly", Coziah, and other leaders, were able to liberate themselves and emancipate the African people;

Whereas Denmark and the United States are two countries united by shared values and a strong commitment to freedom, democracy, human rights, racial justice, economic self-sufficiency, prosperity, free market opportunities, and should continue to provide for more economic and cultural exchanges, trade and investment, and people-to-people contacts;

Whereas these ties continue to be celebrated by a number of organizations such as Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism (C.H.A.N.T), the Danish West Indian Society, Friends of Denmark, Society of Virgin Islands Historians, and the Virgin Islands Social History Associates, among others;

Whereas the Governments of Denmark and the United States Virgin Islands have had discussions regarding establishing a memorandum of understanding in reference to the sharing and preservation of archival records, historic, and prehistoric artifacts;

Whereas there has been ongoing collaboration between schools in the United States Virgin Islands and Denmark allowing teachers and students to share, learn, and strengthen intercultural understandings of a shared history through the creation of new and innovative teaching materials and a common goal to prepare students for global citizenship;

Whereas by sustainable tourism and student exchanges, Danes and Virgin Islanders can become more aware of each other's history and cultures;

Whereas this multicultural, ethnic, national, and racial heritage is an important thread that makes the fabric of all involved, it is particularly important to the future sus-

tainable economic development of the United States Virgin Islands;

Whereas the telling of this portion of the United States story, could be further explored and enhanced by a future National Heritage Area designation;

Whereas the talent, energy, and creativity of Virgin Islanders have nurtured a vibrant society and nation, embracing entrepreneurship, technological advancement, and innovation, and rooted deeply in the respect for education, culture, and international cooperation;

Whereas more collaboration should occur that must transcend the classroom to educate all Virgin Islanders, all United States citizens, and all Danes, well beyond the centennial commemoration in 2017 as education is critical to improving relations, understanding, and the healing process;

Whereas Virgin Islanders and Danish Americans have contributed greatly to the history and development of the United States, and the 100th anniversary of this shared legacy should be properly recognized;

Whereas Virgin Islanders have served the United States in every war and conflict since the Revolutionary War and have contributed to every facet of life in the United States; and

Whereas 2017 marks the 100th anniversary of the Virgin Islands becoming a part of the United States: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate*
2 *concurring)*, That Congress—

1 (1) recognizes and celebrates the 100th anniver-
2 sary of the Virgin Islands becoming a part of the
3 United States;

4 (2) appreciates the years of strong United
5 States-Danish diplomatic relations;

6 (3) encourages the Department of the Interior
7 to lead the Federal effort to commemorate this cen-
8 tennial; and

9 (4) encourages the Archivist of the United
10 States to cooperate with the Governments of Den-
11 mark and the United States Virgin Islands in
12 digitizing the historic records of the Virgin Islands
13 in Federal archives and making them directly acces-
14 sible to the people of the Virgin Islands in secure re-
15 search facilities located on all three major Virgin Is-
16 lands.

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