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Bills Seek to Rename Road and Tennis Court in Honor of Local Luminaries: Bishop Industrious and Fenella Cooper

Senators Joseph and Blyden sponsor bills to immortalize two cherished figures in Virgin Islands history

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Bishop William Industrious and granddaughter Aquila E Dorsey Jackson at the V.I. Legislature in St. Thomas on Tuesday, Feb. 27, 2024. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

In two separate bills sponsored by Senators Carla Joseph and Marvin Blyden, efforts are underway to honor two Virgin Islanders for their contributions to the community in religion and sport.

If passed by the legislature and ultimately signed into law by Governor Albert Bryan Jr., a public roadway will be renamed after Bishop William Industrious, and tennis courts at the University of the Virgin Islands will bear the name of Fenella Cooper, who passed in 2021.

Through Bill 35-0223, Sen. Joseph intends to rename a portion of Gamle Gade on St. Thomas the “William A. Industrious Street.” The section of road runs directly in front of the Christian Unity Church which the soon-to-be 95-year-old Bishop Industrious is credited for establishing.

In testimonies from his colleagues, Mr. Industrious was characterized as a “man that is well loved and respected by the people of the Virgin Islands, and especially those in the Christian Community.” Similar sentiments were shared by his granddaughter Dr. Andrea Dorsey who commended Sen. Joseph for giving him “the flowers he deserves while he is still here with us so that he may know that his labor was not in vain.”

Pastor Angela Rawlins, who continues to work with Mr. Industrious, told legislators of the religious leader’s dedication to the Savan community where his church is located. “When a lot of people would not go to Savan because they think it's a dangerous place, I have seen my bishop speak to young men that will get in trouble in the neighborhood," Mr. Rawlins testified.

Legislators were all in support of the proposed bill. Senator Kenneth Gittens, however, was wary that delays in erecting new signage may occur because the street is located in the historic Charlotte Amalie area. He encouraged the Historic Preservation Committee to work “feverishly” to erect the necessary signage if the bill is successful. “I’m just hoping and praying that the Historic Preservation [Committee] wouldn’t have a problem with us doing this renaming.” The committee responds to applications as they are presented during regular monthly meetings.

Present in the chambers, Mr. Industrious told lawmakers, “My heart is so filled today.” He will turn 95 on March 3rd, 2024.

Meanwhile, Senator Blyden hopes that the tennis courts at the University of the Virgin Islands can be posthumously renamed in honor of Fenella Cooper. Under Bill 35-0107, the renaming would celebrate Dr. Cooper’s contributions to education, sports, and culture in the USVI. “In whatever she did, she helped to shape your mind,” Senator Blyden commented.

Apart from introducing young Virgin Islanders to the sport of tennis and honing their skills, she too was an outstanding player, winning titles locally, regionally, and nationally. Dr. Cooper was also the first coach of UVI’s women’s tennis team.

David Hall, UVI’s president expressed his wholehearted support for the proposal, noting that the tennis facility is currently enjoyed by many members of the community. “It is sometimes used even more by members of the community than our own students,” he remarked. Dr. Cooper’s contributions position her as an “important person in Virgin Islands sports history,” Dr. Hall affirmed. He called for legislators to also appropriate funds for a tennis program and maintenance of the facilities if it were to be renamed in her honor.

Her longtime colleague Sharon Charles spoke of Dr. Cooper’s tendency to give “unselfishly of time, talent and resources,” agreeing with the bill sponsor that “Dr. Cooper has made an indelible mark in the lives of all she interacted with.” Among the lives touched was that of Nicole Craigwell-Syms, assistant commissioner in the Department of Health.

A former athlete herself, Dr. Craigwell-Syms testified that the honor bestowed on Dr. Cooper would “constitute a fitting homage to her significant contributions to the sport of tennis and our

community.” She expressed a hope that the honor would “inspire future generations to emulate her exceptional example,” and called such a move “a potent message that excellence, integrity, and service merit acknowledgement and reverence.”

Both measures received the unanimous support of committee members and will proceed to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary.

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