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Visitor Center to Bear Name of Longtime Community Leader Claire Roker

Bill 35-0239 passes unanimously, honoring Ms. Roker's work in tourism, women's advocacy, and youth development in the Virgin Islands.

Community Center / **Published On July 01, 2024 06:45 AM /**

Janeke Simon **July 01, 2024**

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Claire Roker. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

About half a dozen testifiers were present at Friday's meeting of the Senate Committee on Government Operations Veterans Affairs and Consumer Protection to support the push to honor Claire Lorraine Brown Roker. Bill 35-0239, co-sponsored by Senators Novelle Francis, Kavan James, Angel Bolques Jr., and Donna Frett-Gregory, would name the the visitor center at the Abrahamson marine facility in her honor.

The first to speak was Donna Christian Christiansen, herself an honoree of the Legislature. A friend of Ms. Roker's, Dr. Christiansen quipped that many people call her "the mayor of Frederiksted" because of her long history of community work in the town. Ms. Roker is an "indefatigable volunteer" who "lives for her family" but "still has plenty room for her friends," Dr. Christiansen told lawmakers. "It's often said that if there's a difficult job to be done, give it to a woman. But in the Virgin Islands, if there's a job that's not only difficult, but complex, and probably has to be done creating something out of very little or nothing, give it to Claire and you will end up with a masterpiece."

Ms. Roker's tenure as assistant director of V.I. Dept. of Tourism featured not only the introduction of the Folklife Festival, but according to Dr. Christiansen, "if a famous musical or screen artist was here, you can also bet that Claire was a hand in making that happen."?

Ms. Roker's mentorship of young pageant contestants was another of her attributes that was praised by testifiers. "They were able to develop the self esteem, the self-confidence to hone not only their talents, but to perfect themselves and to be prepared for life and success in their future endeavors. Many have gone on to fulfilling careers here and elsewhere, and that is a remarkable legacy," said Dr. Christiansen, who also praised Ms. Roker for her commitment to the Democratic party in the territory.

According to Jimmy Warren Jr., who has worked with Ms. Roker on a number of community projects in t. Croix, the honoree "inspires you to serve the community." With her commanding presence, "it's very hard to say no to Ms. Roker when she calls," he told lawmakers. He believes that by naming the visitor center in her honor, the center might be "imbued with her spirit," which would then ensure that "the people coming through that gateway to Frederiksted will enjoy a piece of paradise."?

Clema Lewis, executive director of the Women's Coalition of St. Croix, spoke about Ms. Roker's long tenure on the board of the organization as well s her tireless work as a victim advocate, one of those who "went out and responded to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault for many years." Ms. Roker is a staunch advocate for and defender of the Women's Coalition. "You have anything you want to say about us, Claire got a response for you," Ms. Lewis noted, also praising her for her fundraising abilities.

Her longstanding dedication and commitment to the causes she believes in makes Ms. Roker unique, Ms. Lewis argued. "It takes a special person to be so generous and kind for 60 years to care so much for your fellow person. Is a quality all too rare," she noted.

"She belongs to us in the West," Ms. Lewis declared.

?Other testifiers were similarly grateful for Ms. Roker's hard work and dedication to her community, with many sharing anecdotes about how she helped them personally along their life journey. As committee chair Senator Carla Joseph alluded to at the beginning of the session, Ms. Roker's long tenure of public service has been so impactful, so far-reaching that lawmakers didn't need to be convinced of why she was worthy of honor. "We could have just voted on her, but we have to follow through on the process," Sen. Joseph remarked. Indeed, when it came time to vote on whether to advance the bill forward, the motion put forward by Senator Kenneth Gittens was unanimously approved. Bill 35-0239 will now be forwarded to the Committee on Rules & Judiciary for further consideration.?

Ms. Roker, who was on hand to hear the testimony on her behalf and witness the unequivocal support from lawmakers, thanked those who saw it fitting to bestow this honor on her.

