

NOBEL Annual Legislative Conference Comes to USVI With Plans for Extensive Policy Discussions

Hundreds of black women legislators gather in St. Thomas to address economic and educational equity, with sessions on health technology and social justice, and a visit to UVI to explore tuition-free HBCU initiatives

Senate / **Published On August 08, 2024 05:15 AM /**

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Attendees of the NOBEL Annual Legislative Conference gather for a group photo on the steps of the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Building in St. Thomas on Wed. Aug. 7. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE

Members of the National Organization of Black Elected Legislators (NOBEL) have converged in St. Thomas for their annual legislative conference, with a focus on promoting equity and social

justice.

Hundreds of women are expected to attend the four-day conference to learn about the challenges facing black America. Attendees were received by Senators Donna Frett-Gregory and Marise James who serve as this year's conference chair and vice chair respectively.

"We came to the Virgin Islands based on an invitation. Not just because it's the Virgin Islands, but because the work is being done here," said Georgia State Senator and President of NOBEL, Tonya Anderson. She addressed attendees at a press conference on Wednesday, amid a week of planned activities.

"At the end of the day, we are here to create policy. The policy creates the change that we need to see in our communities," Ms. Anderson declared. Discussions during NOBEL's conference are expected to emphasize economic and educational equity, with a planned visit to the University of the Virgin Islands to learn more about the tuition-free HBCU. "This is the work that we are called to do," Ms. Anderson told fellow black legislators. "It's our responsibility and job to continue to stand for our communities so that black and brown people can have that equity and justice, education, economics and empowerment."

Senate President Novelle Francis welcomed attendees, stating. "We in the U.S. Virgin Islands are so pleased to host the country's premier organization [of] black women legislators committed to increasing government, nonprofit and corporate leadership. He recalled the contributions of local women Senators including Alicia Hansen, Cleone Creque, and Ruby Rouss — the first female Senate president in 1981. Only two other women have held the presidency of the legislature since – Lorraine Berry and Donna Frett-Gregory. "I stand on the strong shoulders of these impactful and hardworking women who have helped to shape my political career," Mr. Francis declared.

He was impressed with the topics that NOBEL intends to prioritize, including health technology and economic and educational equality as noted. "These are complex and multifaceted issues that will take time, innovative partnerships and resources to address. Now is the time for important discussions such as these," said the lawmaker. Mr. Francis said he looks forward to hearing the "outcomes generated through this conference" and is eager to "put these impactful ideas into practice."

Established in 1985, the NOBEL annual legislative conference provides the platform for collaboration and policy development to occur among national, state, and local leaders and their constituents through regional forums, national summits, and policy centered conferences.