

The Virgin Islands Consortium

'I Don't Want A Centennial Plate On My Car,' Senator Nelson Says

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ST. THOMAS -- Senator Positive Nelson vehemently opposed the [mandatory Centennial license plate](#) this afternoon, stating on the Earl B. Ottley Senate floor that he does not want the plate on his vehicle. Mr. Nelson was responding to a 6-minute statement by Senator Myron Jackson at the end of a Committee on Government Affairs, Consumers and Veterans Affairs meeting on why he thinks the 2017 Centennial Commemoration is important, and why the new plate design was not out of the Bureau of Motor Vehicle's normal operations.

"The Centennial license plate has been a bone of contention," Mr. Jackson began. The senator, who serves on the Centennial Committee at the request of the Senate president,

said he remains heavily involved in committee activities because, "I do believe that this benchmark is deserving of recognition by the people of the Virgin Islands."

Mr. Jackson went on: "One hundred years under the American flag has its tragedies and it has its joys. It is what it is. History is what it is. We make history in this institution and there's some who will read about it. I plan to make history this coming centennial."

The secretary of Interior said that a person who is naturalized basically got more rights than a native Virgin Islander born under the American flag. So when you start to have these dynamics, this is the time for us to dissect -- to have a reflection, to review, to discuss slavery, colonialism, imperialism, status, constitution -- you name it, and where we want to go. - Sen. Myron Jackson.

But Mr. Nelson contended that Virgin Islanders, instead of receiving their full liberties during the sale of the Virgin Islands from Denmark to the United States in 1917, known as Transfer Day, were sold without input.

"We all have our feelings about the plates and the whole Centennial issue," said Mr. Nelson. "There's been confusion because as much as we're celebrating one hundred years under American rule, we're doing most of our celebrating with Denmark. Where's America's input in our celebration?"

"We're not talking to America. I feel there's been no transfer of power. There was a transfer of ownership; and until Virgin Islanders rise up and empower themselves into what really should have happened in 1917 when a free people were sold without any input, that's the discussion we really need to be having if we're really serious and conscious about what happened."

The veteran senator then railed against the mandatory license plate. "I don't want to wear a Centennial plate," he said. "I'm a senator, I don't want a Centennial plate on my car, period. And I shouldn't be forced to take a Landmark Society plate."

"We have some strong feelings about this that we have not discussed as Virgin Islanders," Mr. Nelson went on, referring to the discussion around the Centennial Commemoration and Transfer Day. "Until then, we're going to stay in this cycle of spiraling downwards because we have yet to empower ourselves."

Mr. Jackson had attempted to explain on the Senate floor today what he had already clarified to The Consortium on Saturday. He told this publication that B.M.V. changes the design of license plates every ten years, and several years ago, knowing that a license plate change was approaching, language in the Centennial Commission bill, enacted during the 29th Legislature, stated that the Centennial Commission should have oversight over any license plate that was being designed, so as to fall in line with the 100th year commemoration. The law also required that the new plate be issued during the 2014-15 cycle, but because of design conflicts between the commission and B.M.V., a final issuance is only now happening.

And in regards to the mandatory change issue, which seems to be the biggest cause of residents' ire, Mr. Jackson said B.M.V. created the firestorm because it did not clearly explain in what context the word "mandatory" was being used. No, you don't have to

spend \$49 on a license plate if your vehicle is not up for registration. However, when the time comes to renew your vehicle's registration, the plates will be replaced with the Centennial design, which has been the case with every new design.

"If you've already registered your car, when you go in next year, you will be issued a new plate that just happens to be the Centennial design," Mr. Jackson said.

Mr. Jackson also told The Consortium that \$10 of the \$49 amount would go directly towards funding Centennial activities. Today, however, he said only \$5 from the \$49 would go towards the commission, and said B.M.V. would have to explain to the people how the remaining funds would be used. He also said that the additional money is needed because of the former administration's lack of attention to the funding needs of the commission, along with neglect from the Senate. "The governor said straight out that his credit card cannot put together an observance worthy of this centennial. We need the money."

Mr. Jackson said today that the extra charge to pay for Centennial activities was done "in good faith." And on the matter of Transfer Day and how the territory should move forward -- whether to remain with the U.S. or seek self-governance -- He said, "I've said on the floor that [the most recent discussions](#) by the Department of Interior regarding self-determination and not having an invitation sent to this institution for whatever reason that was, was an error; and is something that I ask my colleagues to pay attention to.

"We most recently learned about Puerto Rico and the challenges they're having, and likewise the proposed bill that Congress is introducing [regarding the oversight](#) and we come back to it: status. The secretary of Interior said that a person who is naturalized basically got more rights than a native Virgin Islander born under the American flag. So when you start to have these dynamics, this is the time for us to dissect -- to have a reflection, to review, to discuss slavery, colonialism, imperialism, status, constitution -- you name it, and where we want to go."