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USVI to Host N.O.B.E.L. Women Conference in 2023, Representing Major Opportunity for Economy and National Influence

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The U.S. Virgin Islands will play host to the National Organization of Black Elected Legislative (N.O.B.E.L.) Women in July 2023 on St. Thomas, the Office of Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory made known Wednesday.

The announcement represents a major opportunity for the territory on various levels, including exposure to major economic players who sponsor the event, while providing the USVI with an opportunity to build ties with leaders on the mainland whose goals of positive impact align with local challenges.

The decision was made following a meeting hosted by Ms. Frett-Gregory this week, which also included other members of the 34th Legislature.

Ms. Frett-Gregory's office said the N.O.B.E.L Women, led by President Juandalynn Givan, the state representative from Alabama, were visiting the territory as part of a process to vet locations for their Annual Legislative Conference. Ms. Givan was joined by 2nd Vice President Tonya Anderson, state senator from Georgia, Treasurer Regina Barrow, state senator from Louisiana, and N.O.B.E.L. Historian and President Elect of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL), Laura Hall, state representative from Alabama.

The annual meeting attracts more than 200 Black women legislators along with corporate and community leaders to discuss matters impacting Black communities nationwide. The formal announcement to include naming Ms. Frett-Gregory as the ALC committee chair will be made during the 2022 Annual Legislative Conference in Washington D.C. on October 7.

During an interview with the Consortium Wednesday night, Ms. Givan said opportunities await the territory as a result of the upcoming conference. "I feel that if I'm going to put economic dollars into a community, why not put it into a community that is populated by Black, Caribbean people just as I would put it into areas that are highly represented by other ethnicities," Ms. Givan said as she spoke on the decision to choose the USVI.

"To me it was God's divine purpose for us to be here," she also stated, revealing that once officially announced on Oct. 7, the decision to choose the USVI as the location for the 2023 conference will be her first as chair of the board and president of N.O.B.E.L. Women. Ms. Givan has been in the territory for about a week and has met with local stakeholders both public and private including officials of the V.I. Dept. of Tourism and executives of Frenchman's Reef.

"We're not only coming as legislative leaders, we're also bringing the influences of major corporations that may have never ever come to the Virgin Islands," said Ms. Givan, who also revealed Coca-Cola, pharmaceutical company Vertex, and AT&T as some of the event's sponsors.

"We are policy-driven women. We represent a constituency base where we render service. We deal with issues for education, health care, homelessness — the issues never change. The people change, the representation may change, but the issues always remain the same: the debt crises, the economy, social justice — situations that arise day in and day out," Ms. Givan further stated as she sought to place emphasis on the benefits the territory will see as a result of the 2023 conference.

She also spoke about N.O.B.E.L. Women's national STE(A)M initiative named "Girls, Gigabytes and Gadgets (3G)", an innovative, day-long series of workshops held in member districts throughout the country designed to expose young women and girls of color to careers within the science, technology, engineering, arts/design and mathematics disciplines.

"This is very significant especially in our school system. We have a leadership institute where we have young women of color who come from all across this country that we have also helped to mold, and they are now some of our top leaders who are now running corporations," Ms. Givan said. "They are doctors, lawyers, they are also elected officials, policy leaders throughout this nation and throughout the world. So N.O.B.E.L. Women and our conference is very significant in that we're not here to party, but where here to give guidance, to awaken the consciousness of a greater community and a greater cause."

Ms. Frett-Gregory said the conference also gives the territory "an opportunity to learn and see that the issues that we're experiencing here are not unique to the Virgin Islands, and it also allows us to work with other representatives and state legislators on our challenges."

The event also expands the territory's relationships to include a wide pool of powerful individuals with national influence. "It allows us to build that connection where we can actually have the conversations on the national level," the Senate president said. "So when we have similar issues we can champion those issues and work together to push those issues up to Congress."

This year's event in Washington, D.C. on Oct. 7 will mark the 37th Annual Legislative Conference.

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