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## Senate Committee Honors Dr. Donna Christensen's Legacy and Proposes Facility Renaming

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**Dr. Donna Marie Christian-Christensen at Wednesday's Senate hearing. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE**

The Senate Committee on Government Operations, Veteran Affairs and Consumer Protection was filled with admiring, awestruck testimony regarding the life's work of Dr. Donna Marie Christian-Christensen, the former doctor, public health, and political leader.

Several of the testifiers expressed some form of the above sentiment when recalling all the work Dr. Christensen has done over a career that has spanned decades, work that has brought her to what is called the legacy firsts – the first female physician to serve in Congress, the first woman to represent the Virgin Islands in Congress, and the first female territorial representative to serve in

Congress, among others.

The committee was considering Bill 35-0029, introduced by Senator Novelle Francis Jr. and co-sponsored by Sen. Angel Bolques, Jr. and several other lawmakers. The legislation not only seeks to commend Dr. Christensen, but to memorialize her service to the community by renaming the new facility erected subsequent to the demolition of the Charles Harwood Memorial Complex in her honor.

"I certainly had the opportunity as the son of a public health nurse to see Dr. Christensen in action many times," said Sen. Francis. "Throughout her medical and professional political career, she was acutely aware of the challenges experienced by our community in accessing maternal and child health, and this informed her in terms of advocacy in Congress."

Justa Encarnacion, current commissioner of the Department of Health, spoke warmly about working with the then-physician. "During her tenure as assistant commissioner at the Emergency Department of Health, Dr. Christensen has implemented an innovative program aimed at nurturing high school students with aspirations of pursuing medical or healthcare profession training," she noted.

Monique Clendinen Watson, who served as Dr. Christensen's chief of staff for 16 years while Dr. Christensen was a congresswoman, said in written testimony, "She found time to be a tireless advocate for the youth of St. Croix, an advocacy that resulted in St. Croix being granted a second high school, now known to all as the St. Croix Educational Complex."

Several former lawmakers testified to her political acumen and her lack of interest in power for its own sake. President of the 30th Legislature and former congressional aide for Dr. Christensen, Shawn-Michael Malone, noted that the esteemed physician was not only active in the territory. He praised her efforts to ensure that some of the over \$300 million that went into fighting HIV/AIDS during the Clinton-Gore administration benefited not just Africa, but also the Caribbean.

Former Senator James O'Brian was the first to press for the honoree to also be given the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor that "she deserves," a call to which committee chair Senator Carla Joseph responded with news that an amendment to that effect was in the works. "It will be done," said the senator.

Following the overwhelmingly positive testimony that all supported the commendation and honoring of Dr. Donna Christensen, Sen. Francis's proposed legislation was unanimously approved by the lawmakers present at the hearing. The measure will now move to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further vetting and consideration.