

Highlights From the Hill

Congresswoman Donna M. Christian-Christensen Reports to the Virgin Islands Community

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Spring 2000



Legislation to Watch for This Session

In response to the needs of the Territory and constituent requests, Del. Christensen has introduced a number of bills this spring.

HR 3512 - a bill to exempt certain small passenger vessels that operate in waters of the U. S. Virgin Islands from inspection. We continue to press forward with this bill. Our goal is to get the bill moving by securing a hearing on it before the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation subcommittee of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. We recently wrote to Resources Committee Chairman Don Young, the second ranking Republican member of the Com-

mittee to ask his help in getting a hearing on the bill sometime this summer. The letter was a follow-up to his offer to help the islands after his spring trip to the Territory.

Amendment to HR 4141 (the Education Opportunities to Protect and Invest in our Nation's Students Act) - to provide for the reauthorization of the Territorial General Assistance Program. We continue to push for the reauthorization of this program, which was used to fund a variety of education needs of the Territory including school construction and repair, curriculum development, teacher training, and remedial education.

With the help of Rep. Major Owens of New York, we offered an amendment to HR 4141 to include the General Assistance Program in this bill. We were not successful in our attempt but hope to offer the amendment again when the bill comes to the floor of the House next month.

Cigarette Prohibition - This spring, a ban on the re-importation of previously exported duty-free cigarettes into the U.S. for personal use was put into effect by the U.S. Customs Service and the U.S. Department of Treasury. In

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Delegate's Health Care Agenda Has Local and National Scope

Health Officials to Bring Resources to V.I.

The Virgin Islands' health care system is on its way to receiving a major boost in resources in coming years from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Delegate Christensen

is spearheading an initiative to restructure the territory's health care system toward a more community based model as the result of earlier hearings on health care delivery in 1999. The initiative, which is currently being implemented, calls on the V.I. government to imple-

ment a plan of action to improve the quality of care for residents, bring community health facilities into compliance, and overhaul the islands' mental health and substance abuse programs. The U.S. Department of Health

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U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Davidatcher commends Del. Christensen's efforts to eliminate disparities in health care.

Delegate's Health Care Agenda

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and Human Services will assist local officials over an extended time period for long term benefit.

Disease Prevention is Focus at CBC Spring Health Braintrust

Nationally the Delegate is also setting the tone on how matters concerning minority health care should be handled. In her second year as Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus' (CBC) Health Braintrust which oversees the implementation of substantial health care policy

for people of color, Christensen is working with Department of Health and Human Services Officials, community health leaders, and Congress to ensure the passage of culturally relevant legislation that will dictate how federal funding is channeled into communities of color in the future.

At the Spring Health Braintrust in early April, the Delegate focused on the need for community involvement in getting families to research their medical history as a means of prevent-

ing the onset of deadly diseases such as heart disease and stroke.

The Fall Health Braintrust will be held on September 14 and 15 in Washington, DC and will focus on adolescent health and substance abuse.

Resources Committee Hears Testimony on V.I. Constitution

On May 17, 2000 the House Resources Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives heard testimony today from Virgin Islanders and Guamanians on HR 3999, legislation sponsored by Committee Chairman Don Young to clarify the process for the adoption of a local constitution in the two island territories.

Testifying on behalf of the Virgin Islands were Governor Charles

Turnbull, Senate President Vargrave Richards, ICM Territorial Chair Raymond Richards and Republican National Committeeman Holland Redfield. Each presenter gave a different perspective on the need for the bill to be passed.

HR 3999 is important to both territories because it paves the way for the elimination of the unnecessary step of having Congress act on local matters

in the two remaining areas under the American flag that do not have a local constitution.

The bill will be considered by the Resources committee later this spring and once passed will go to the House and Senate for final passage. Copies of HR 3999 are available at the Congressional Offices.

Options Explored to Make Higher Education and Housing Affordable

In April residents had an opportunity to talk one on one with representatives of Sallie Mae Corporation, one of the leading national financial aid lenders, about ways to finance their children's college education. Sallie Mae encourages parents to look at "free" money for education such as scholarships and grants before considering a

loan, but the company provides a wide variety of services to assist in the financing of a college education. The workshops highlighted strategies for assessing the family's ability to make a financial contribution to college expenses and provided reference tools for parents on how to manage costs.

Also in April, Representatives of Fannie Mae, the nation's largest source of financing for home mortgages, got a first hand look at the housing needs of Virgin Islands residents while in the Territory to meet with Delegate Christensen and members of the housing industry for a Hous-

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Gov. Turnbull, Senate President Vargrave Richards, ICM Party Chair Raymond Richards, and Republican National Committee Chairman Holland Redfield testify before the House Resources Committee on Capitol Hill.



Jonathan Hughes of Fannie Mae Corporation addresses the need for affordable housing options in the Virgin Islands.

Sallie Mae and Fannie Mae Address needs of Virgin Islands Residents

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ing Industry Roundtable, the first in a series of discussions.

Delegate Christensen invited the group to the islands to explore ways to improve the V.I. economy through affordable housing and homeownership. After two days of lively and informative discussion on the issue, plans are being made to develop partnerships between the national housing giant and V.I. lenders.

Fannie Mae does not provide home mortgages to individuals, however, the company works with lenders in a particular area to lower costs for obtaining loans and make homeownership a reality for all Americans. Discussions will continue in the months ahead to evaluate the best strategies for the Territory's housing needs.



Del. Christensen talks with parents about educational funding options at a town meeting in St. Croix.

Constituent News

Tours

Tickets for White House Tours are in limited supply. We recommend submitting a request to the Congressional District offices at least six weeks in advance to increase your chances of getting a tour.

Tickets for U.S. Capitol Tours should be obtained at least four weeks in advance of your trip.

Scholarship and Internship Information/Deadlines:

Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Scholarship -

(open to college-bound high school seniors and current college students)

Congressional Summer Internship -

(current college students)

Students should submit a letter of intent and background infor-

mation to: Steven Steele, Office Manager, Office of Rep. Donna Christian-Christensen, 1711 Longworth HOB, Washington, DC 20515.

For more information contact the Congressional District Offices below:

St. Thomas - 340-774-4408

St. Croix - 340-778-5900



Virgin Islands Constituents Lunford Williams and Gerard Luz James I meet with the Delegate about small business issues in Washington, D.C.

Legislative Priorities This Session

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light of the adverse impact on store owners and visitors to the Territory, Delegate Christensen worked with House Ways and Means Committee Ranking Member Rep. Charles Rangel to introduce an amendment to reverse the ban.

Efforts to have the amendment included in a major trade bill did not materialize due to last minute decisions to eliminate all non-trade amendments to the Caribbean Basin Initiative/Africa Trade Bill.

Rep. Rangel will be sending a letter to Treasury Secretary of the Treasury Lawrence Sum-

mers to request that he continue to abide by the ruling of the District Court case until such time as Mr. Rangel can find another vehicle for this legislation.

What Delegate Christensen Does for YOU in Washington

What does the Delegate do?

Ever so often, I field questions from constituents about the role of the Delegate to Congress. Let me take this opportunity to provide information based on my three and a half years of experience and the Congressional Research Service's publication on *The Role of A Member of Congress*.

My official duties include:

Representation of the people of the Virgin Islands on federal issues that affect them. This includes on legislation moving through both the House and the Senate, issues that originate out of the various federal departments and issues that originate through White House policy. This includes assisting the local government, business and non-profit organizations in obtaining federal grants, and analyzing the provisions of proposed legislation for its impact on the territory.

Service to constituents on a variety of issues. Constituents approach us for assistance within

the conduct of their business with federal departments and agencies. On a daily basis, we assist them in identifying the key persons to which to address their concerns, write letters on their behalf and advocate for them on federal issues until issues are resolved.

Participate in national policymaking. Through participation in task forces, caucuses and committees and through meetings with policymakers in the private, public and non-profit sector, I have the opportunity to participate in national policymaking in health, the environment and economic issues to ensure that the territory is a beneficiary of good programs.

Work on Committee and on the Floor. For the Virgin Islands, this means participating in the hearings, legislative drafting and mark-ups, and voting in the Resources Committee, which has direct oversight over the affairs of the territory. I am also a Member of the Small Business Committee, which I utilize to help the development of a stronger private sector in the territory. While I have no vote on the floor, I participate in debate on

legislation crucial to the territory.

Oversight and Investigation. I am also involved in monitoring the efficiency, effectiveness and adequacy of existing federal programs and the operations and management of executive agencies.

Education. It is also my duty to bring to the attention of my constituents the policy issues and activities of the federal government to encourage full citizen participation. Through this newsletter, press releases, speeches and personal appearances at various functions it is my job to let you know what goes on in Washington, D.C.



Del. Christensen listens to testimony at a House Resources Committee Hearing on HR 3999, to revise the process of adopting a local constitution in both the USVI and Guam.

**For More Information
about articles in this
newsletter contact the
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