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Governor Bryan Signs Order Establishing Committee to Plan 175th Anniversary Celebrations of Emancipation Proclamation

Governor sets aside $1 million and names 9-member panel to oversee planning of host of events to commemorate signing of historic document ending slavery in United States

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS— Governor Albert Bryan Jr. held a press conference at Government House on St. Croix on Friday, July 1 to sign an executive order establishing the committee to oversee the Territory's preparations for events to celebrate next year's 175th Anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

The Governor named former Senator Carol Burke to chair the committee, and he set aside $1 million for the committee to plan a variety of events to commemorate the end of slavery in the United States.

Video of the press conference is at youtube.com/watch?v=a7SstPq1VmI

Governor Bryan recalled speaking with his nephew, who spoke about President Abraham Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation to free the slaves.

"I had to correct him and said, 'Listen, nobody freed us. We freed ourselves here in the Virgin Islands,'" the Governor said. "It's the same fireburn and spirit that is in us now. The same that drove General Buddhoe to move his people to a place where they could be emancipated."

The Governor said that part of the commemoration of the historic date will include putting plaques and busts throughout the Territory naming local culture-bearers and keepers of the flame who helped pave the way to freedom.

“So our children can remember that there are those who came before them. That they look not only to Martin Luther King Jr., but also to Queen Matilda and to Ruby Rouss, to know that they have come from something beautiful,” Governor Bryan said.

During the press conference, Chairwoman Burke introduced the members of the committee who were present:

Chairwoman Carol M. Burke
- Teri Helenese
- Maureen Burke-Ventura
- Khnuma Simmonds
- Akeem McIntosh
- Senator Carla Joseph

Members of the committee who were not present are:
- Former Senator Myron Jackson
- Jamila Russell
- Jelani Ritter

Chairwoman Burke gave an oversight into what the committee plans for next year’s celebration.

“We will engage the entire community, and especially highlight Frederiksted, Christiansted, Charlotte Amalie, Water Island and Cruz Bay,” Ms. Burke said. “However, the first thing that we will do is to host a reception in honor of the keepers of the flame posthumously. There are currently 40 names attached to this designation, and the committee will complete the roll call with 175 names.”

The Bryan-Roach Administration is investing in the Territory’s people, infrastructure and future through transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in the government and ensuring that recovery projects are completed as quickly as possible. Visit transparency.vi.gov

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