



6th Constitutional Convention

Legislature USVI

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0:00:00 . so my Thank you.

0:02:00 Thank you. Thank you.

0:03:00 Thank you. Thank you.

0:04:00 Thank you. Thank you.

0:05:00 Thank you. Thank you. Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah, that me uh

0:07:49 so so do so 🎸 guitar solo E lo la la le lo le lo la

0:10:53 E lo la la le lo le lo la Thank you.

0:11:49 🎸 🎸 🎸 Thank you.

0:13:19 Thank you. I'm here.

0:14:19 Thank you. Oh, my God. so so so so

0:17:19 so so I love you.

0:18:49 Oh, my God. Thank you. [2 such phrases repeated 11 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:24:19 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back.

0:27:19 Thank you. 🎸 [2 such phrases repeated 12 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

- 0:33:19 Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back.
- 0:34:49 Thank you. Thank you. ¶¶ Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats. Ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats.
- 0:37:13 Hello. Good morning, people of the United States, Virgin Islands. Welcome to the Sixth Constitutional Convention Oath of Office Ceremony. To formally welcome us to the ceremony and to acknowledge this occasion. We recognize the Senate President of the 36th Legislature of the United States, Virgin Islands, the Honorable Milton E. Potter.
- 0:38:22 Milton E. Potter Good morning, good morning everyone, colleagues. A special good morning to our Lieutenant Governor, the Honorable Troganza Roach, our Congresswoman, the Honorable Stacey Plaskett, presiding judge of the Superior Court, the Honorable Deborah Watlington, our Supervisor of Election, and Carolyn Fox. Good morning to the people of the Virgin Islands, both in the chambers as well as in the viewing and listening audience. I want to also acknowledge our students who are here in the audience with us today, from All Saints, from Charlotte Amari, hi, and from my alma mater, Ivana Udawakian. So let's give them a little special. I know they have a pass to be here, for sure. And we want to just give an extra special good morning to the 15 elected members of the Sixth Constitutional Convention of the Virgin Islands. To the delegates, and I know they're probably hearing in the back, I want to just say to them, you have been entrusted by the people of the Virgin Islands with an incredible responsibility of crafting the framework that will shape our territory's future.
- 0:39:41 Your diverse backgrounds, deep understanding of VI culture, and commitment to progress make you uniquely qualified for this momentous task. As you begin this journey, remember that you carry not only the hopes of our current generation but also the dreams of those who came before us and the aspirations of those who will follow. The path ahead requires wisdom, it requires patience and dedication to the principles of democracy and self-government. Your decisions will echo through generations influencing how we govern ourselves and preserve our unique Virgin Islands heritage. May the Most High bless you and your deliberations and may He bless the Virgin Islands of the United States.
- 0:40:40 We welcome to the stage the delegates elect who will be serenaded with Can't Give Up now by Jeanette Reimer. have to climb and there will be battles that you will have to fight but victory or defeat it's up to you to decide because how can you expect to win if you never try You just can't give up now You've come too far from where you started from Cause nobody told you that the road is gonna be easy And I don't believe he's brought you this far to leave you Never said there wouldn't be trials Never said you wouldn't fall Never said that everything would go The way you want it to go But when your back is against the wall And you feel all hope is gone Lift your head up to the sky And say, help me to be strong
- 0:42:49 Oh, cause you just can't give up now You've come too far from where you started from Cause nobody told you that this road is gonna be easy And I don't believe he's brought you this far to leave you No, he didn't bring you out here to leave you lonely Even when you can't see clearly I know that he will be with you So you say I just can't Give up now I've come too far From where I started from Cause nobody told you Nobody told you That this road is gonna be easy And I don't believe This budget is hard to leave you No, no, no, no, no, no, no You just can't give up now You've come too far from where you started from Nobody told you, nobody told you that this road is gonna be easy and I don't believe he's brought you this far to leave you.
- 0:44:43 No, no, no, no, no, no, no, you just can't give up now, you've come too far from where you started from, Cause nobody told you, nobody told you That this road is gonna be easy And I don't believe he's brought you this far to leave me And you can sing it for yourself Sing I just can't give up now I've come too far from where I started from Nobody told you, nobody told me That this road is gonna be easy And I don't believe he's brought me this far to leave me We have welcomed to the stage the Delegates-elect. Delegate, please stand as your name is called.
- 0:46:10 John J. Abramson Jr. Liliano Bilardo De O'Neal. John M. Kanagata. Devin F. Carrington. Imani Daniel. Lydia Hendricks. Rudell A. Hodge Jr. Stedman Hodge Jr. Ussie Raymond Richards. Akima Richardson. Rupert W. Ross Jr., Ronald Russell, David Silverman, Arturo Washington Jr., Watlington Jr., my apologies, and joining us virtually, Alicia M. Wells. Ladies and gentlemen, please stand with delegates for the invocation by the legislative chaplet Reverend Charles L.
- 0:47:09 Brown. Let every heart pray. God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we pause at the outset of this historic gathering to recognize you as sovereign, our sovereign lord lord over our nation lord over our territory lord over our legislative districts lord over this constitutional convention and lord over all of the stakeholders who have come together for this monumental occasion i pray that all business that is done today is done towards the goal of identifying and proposing our own Virgin Islands Constitution in a way that is transparent and in a manner that improves the confidence and trust of our people in the political process. Right now Lord God we pray for each and every delegate. John J. Abramson Jr., Liliana Bellardo D. O'Neill, John M. Kanagata, Delvin F. Carrington, Imani Daniel, Lydia Hendricks, Rudell A. Hodge Jr.,

Stedman Hodge Jr., Uzi Raymond Richards, Akema Richardson, Rupert W. Ross Jr., Ronald Russell, David Silverman, Arturo Watlington Jr., and Alicia M. Wells. anoint them Lord God from the top of their heads to the soles of their feet cover the delegates such that when temptation rises to appeal to good old politics let a desire rise up in them to do right by the people today is a day we need you God to be God all by yourself and help us to be the best versions of ourselves that we can be. We know that the road has not been easy but we've come too far for you to leave us. And so God, we're calling on you today to help us press towards the mark

0:49:31 and help make our territory better in the matchless name of Jesus I pray. Amen. Please remain standing for the National Anthem and Virgin Islands March. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:52:17 Thank you. Please be seated. We welcome Caroline Fox, Supervisor of Elections, for the reading of the certification and presentation of the delegates.

0:53:30 Good morning, Honourables Lieutenant Governor Roach, Delegate to Congress Plaskett, Senate President Milton Potter, Presiding Judge Superior Court of the Virgin Islands, Judge Watlington, members of the 36th Legislature, Virgin Islanders, present and listening and viewing, and all our distinguished guests. Pursuant to Title 18, Chapter 3, Section 47, Act 86-81, and Act 87-34, all duties relative to the certification of the results of the general election of the November 5th, 2024 have been completed and it has been determined that the following delegates have been elected members of the Sixth Constitutional Convention for the Virgin Islands of the United States.

0:54:30 As your name is alphabetically called per district, please stand to be recognized and then take your seat. Appearing virtually, the at-large delegate, St. John Alicia M. Wells. Next, Delegates District of St. Croix, John J. Abramson, Jr. Give him a little clap. Get some life in here. Liliana Bellado de O'Neil.

0:55:08 John M. Kanigata, Devin Carrington Esquire, Uzi Raymond Richards, Rupert W. Ross, Jr. Ronald Russell, Esquire.

0:55:48 Delegates, District of St. Thomas, St. John. Imani Daniel. Lydia Hendrix. Rudell A. Hodge, Jr. Steadman Hodge, Jr. Akima Richardson David Silverman Arturo Watlington, Jr., Esquire.

0:56:44 Will all the members of the six constitutional conventions please stand? Thank you and remain standing. Now to administer the oath, we welcome the Honorable Deborah S. Watlington, presiding judge, Superior Court of the Virgin Islands. Good morning, everyone.

0:57:12 Good morning. I'm going to ask all of the delegates to say their names individually after I say aye, starting with Mr. Abramson and ending with Miss Wells. Please raise your right hand to be sworn. Aye. John Jr. John Michael Kennegaetha. Lani Kai Daniels. Benjamin Hodge Jr.

0:57:48 Do solemnly affirm, do solemnly affirm that I will support, obey, and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States, applicable to the United States Virgin Islands, and the laws of the United States Virgin Islands.

0:58:42 That I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion. And that I will faithfully and impartially discharge the duties as delegate, in the case of Ms. Wells as at-large delegate. As at-large delegate. For the Sixth Constitutional Convention. For the Sixth Constitutional Convention. Of the Virgin Islands. Of the Virgin Islands. With fidelity. With fidelity. So help me God.

0:59:41 So help me God. Congratulations, everyone. Thank you. Congratulations to our delegates. Thank you very much for joining us today for this ceremony. We will now receive the benediction from the Legislature's Chaplain, Reverend Charles L. Brown. Please stand.

1:00:23 God, for this day, we give you thanks and praise that we have done our part to move our territory forward in the recognition of those who have been elected by the people of the Virgin Islands. We now ask for your continued covering as they begin the deliberative process that will take us closer to a paradise here in these Virgin Islands, that we, the people, will have had an indelible voice in the shaping of our future. Bless us, Lord, with your Holy Spirit, that we might support them in the most honorable ways and inspire them to be the people you've called them to be for such a time as this, amen, amen.

1:01:20 The listening and viewing audience is invited to continue tuning in for the organization of the Sixth Constitutional Convention which will occur after a short break. Please be seated. All right, guys, let me see what he says. Oh, my God. Oh Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

1:07:04 Oh, my God. so so so Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. guitar solo Thank you.

1:12:34 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

1:14:04 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

1:16:34 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

1:18:04 Oh, my God. me Oh, my God.

1:19:34 right Oh, my God.

1:20:34 do Thank you. guitar solo La la la la la la, la la la, la la la la the……iah. Hiya! 🎸 🎸

1:23:10 🎸 Thank you. Thank you.

1:24:40 🎸 🎸 Thank you. 🎸 so so so

1:27:40 do so so Thank you.

1:29:40 I'll see you next time Oh, my God. Thank you. Thank you. Here we go. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Oh, my God.

1:35:40 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

1:38:40 Thank you. 🎸 Thank you. 🎸 🎸 🎸

1:41:39 La la de lo te lo dai La la de lo te lo dai Thank you. Thank you.

1:43:09 Oh, yeah, man. Thank you. Oh, my God. so so

1:45:39 so so so so For more information, visit www.fema.org

1:48:09 Convention delegates, we're going to resume in two minutes. In two minutes we'll resume. Thank you. [3 such phrases repeated 11 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

1:53:39 Oh, my God. so Thank you. Oh, my God. so Thank you.

1:56:39 Good afternoon everyone. The formation session of the Sixth Constitutional Convention is now called to order. Per Act 86-81, as Senate President, I'm authorized to serve as a temporary presiding officer for the Sixth Constitutional Convention of the Virgin Islands until a permanent officer or permanent officers are elected. Madam Clerk, can we please have a roll call? Delegate John J. Abramson Jr. Present. Delegate J. Abramson Jr. Present. Delegate Liliana Belardo de O'Neal. Present. Delegate Belardo de O'Neal, Present. Delegate John M. Kennegeda. Present. Delegate Devin F. Carrington, Present. Delegate Carrington, Present. Delegate Imani Daniel. Present. Delegate Daniel, Present. Delegate Lydia Hendricks. Present. Delegate Hendricks, Present.

1:57:56 Delegate Rudell A. Hodge, Jr. Present. Delegate Hodge, Jr., present. Delegate Stedman Hodge, Jr. Here. Delegate Hodge, Jr., present. Delegate Ussi Raymond Richards. Here. Delegate Richards, present. Delegate Akima Richardson. Present. Delegate Richardson, present. Delegate Rupert W. Ross, Jr.

1:58:25 Present. Delegate Ross Jr. present. Delegate Ronald Russell. Delegate Russell present. Delegate David Silverman. Delegate Silverman present. Delegate Arturo Watlington Jr. present. Delegate Watlington Jr. present. Delegate Alicia M. Wells. Here. Delegate Wells present. Mr. President, 15 delegates present. Thank you very much. We have a quorum, and we're prepared to proceed. Is there a motion? Motion, Mr. President. Motion, Mr. President.

1:59:07 Delicate Carrington, you're recognized for your motion. I hereby make a motion to adopt Resolution 001 of the sixth constitutional convention, signed by a majority of the delegates, establishing the officers of the sixth constitutional convention to serve on the Executive Committee. Those officers are as follows. President, UCR Richards, Vice President, Stedman Hodge, Secretary, Emani Daniel, Treasurer, John J. Abramson. Motion.

1:59:41 Second. Objection. Properly moved by Delegate Carrington, seconded by Delegate Richards, objected to... Abramson. Abramson. Delegate Abramson, objected to by Delegate Watlington, roll call. Mr. Chairman, may I speak on my objection? No. Mr. Chairman, may I speak on my objection?

2:00:10 Following the roll call, Delegate Watlington will allow you... Excuse me, is the court really running the discussion? Or are you hearing telling you what to do? No, Delegate. We're going to entertain the roll call at this time, Delegate Watlinton. We're in the middle of the roll call right now.

2:00:45 Madam Clerk, can we please have the roll call? Delegate John J. Abramson, Jr. Delegate Aramson, Jr., yay. Delegate Liliana Bellardo DeO'Neal, yes. Delegate DeO'Neal, yay. Delegate John M. Kanagata, yes. Delegate Kanagata, yay. Delegate Devin F. Carrington, yes. Delegate Carrington, yay. Delegate Imani Daniel, no.

2:01:15 She'll say yes. Delegate Daniel, nay. Delegate Lydia Hendricks, no. Delegate Hendricks, nay. Delegate Rudell A. Hodge, Jr. Delegate Hodge, Jr., nay. Delegate Steadman Hodge, Jr. Delegate Hodge, Jr., yay. Delegate Lucy Raymond Richards,

delegate Richards, yay delegate akima richardson delegate richardson yay delegate rupert w ross jr delegate richardson
 nay delegate rupert w ross jr delegate ross jr yay delegate ronald russell delegate russell yay Delegate David Silverman.
 Nay.

2:02:17 Delegate Silverman. Nay. Delegate Arturo Watlington Jr. Delegate Watlington Jr. Nay. Delegate Alicia M. Wells. Nay.
 Delegate Wells. Nay. Mr. President, eight yeas, seven nays. Thank you very much. The motion carries. I would be able to
 speak on my motion and my objection after the roll call. I just want to congratulate the new chair, new president,
 Delegate Ussi Raymond Richards. Congratulations.

2:03:01 At this point, I'm going to relinquish the chair to the new president of the Sixth Constitutional Convention, Delegate Ussi
 Raymond Richards. The President, good morning to all.

2:03:49 And given this occasion, I will take the privilege of the Chair to ensure that each one of us has at least three minutes to
 address our family friends and the individuals that are both viewing and listening and so we'll start with delegate
 Richardson you're recognized for for three minutes you could pull the mic out yes thank you President Richards it is a
 pleasure to be here today and I just want to thank all of the audience whether virtual or in person for coming and just
 showing your support i also want to congratulate my fellow delegates on a job well done we've come very far today i also
 want to share that this constitutional convention this is virgin island's history in the making and we have a major role to
 play it is my hopes that my fellow delegates and i can put any existing or pre-existing differences aside to get the job
 done. We work for the people and we want to do our best job so with that being said thank you. Thank you Delegate
 Richardson. Delegate Daniel. Thank you all I I appreciate it. I'm going to read some thoughts, and then I'll speak
 candidly. Honorable delegates, esteemed guests, and my fellow Virgin Islanders, good morning. I sit before you today
 with deep gratitude and an even greater sense of responsibility. This moment is not just about any one of us. It's about all
 of us, a people, a history, a future yet to be written. To the indigenous people on whose land we sit, I share in your grief
 and vow to disrupt the colonial paradigm that so unjustly unsettled your people. To our ancestors, I give thanks for those
 who loved, fought, dreamed, sacrificed, and existed so that we may continue this multi-generational pursuit of freedom. I
 ask that you continue to guide us with care and cover and rejoice in our efforts. To my parents, siblings, friends, and
 family, thank you for encouraging me to dream big, and thank you for always saying yes first and asking questions later.
 Sharing this space and journey with you is truly the journey of a lifetime. To the Virgin Islands

2:06:15 millennials near and far. This one is for you, for Aloe. To prove the necessity and power of our existence and influence
 here in the Virgin Islands. Get organized, get engaged, get home, and get to work. To the youth of the Virgin Islands, I
 apologize for your systemic neglect. You all have inherited loss but you truly deserve the world. I pray that you seek
 reparation from us and not revenge on us for the mismanagement of your innocence. The future we are building today is
 yours. To the people of the Virgin Islands, thank you. I wish I could but I cannot promise you changes tomorrow or even
 really in the near future. What I can promise is that this year we will draft a constitution worthy of your support and
 within the next two years the world will know of our collective fight for equity, autonomy, and dignity. I ask that you
 unapologetically hold us accountable to this mission. To my fellow delegates, we gather here as a sixth constitutional
 convention, carrying forward a torch the generations before us have lit. Their work was not in vain and neither will ours.
 This is not merely a meeting of minds but a gathering of purpose and today we affirm our commitment to drafting a
 constitution that reflects our values, our resilience and our unwavering determination to shape a more just, equitable and
 prosperous Virgin Islands and I will speak candidly it's day one and I'm already incredibly disappointed in this
 convention and the way that we organized and the way that we chose leadership and in the way that promises and
 intentions were broken I think we are upholding the status quo and the Virgin Islands and we are not pushing forward
 Millennials and youth and women who deserve to lead

2:07:59 who are capable of leaving, leading. And so all I will leave you with is who don't have this feel. And the Virgin Islands
 people are feeling. You had an opportunity here to do something different and you chose not to and we'll see how it goes.
 And I will use the remaining part of my time to ask everyone to please support the Family Resource Center on St.
 Thomas and St. John and the Women's Coalition on St. Croix so that we may put an end to domestic violence and the
 territory of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Thank you. Thank you kindly, Delegate Daniel. We now hear from Delegate
 Hendricks.

2:08:47 Hendricks. That's okay. Repeat it again. Delegate Lydia Hendricks. You could pull the microphone out so you could no
 that's it won't work in that you have to use a microphone so it could be on the record okay good morning all
 congratulations to all of the persons present here and the podium with me this morning I wanted to say all of the students
 that you saw here this morning were brought here for reason it's not about us it's about them they are going to be the
 leaders and so I commend all of the students that came this morning I hope it was a worthwhile experience for them and
 now I will speak on my behalf I decided to run for the constitutional convention for many reasons but everybody knows

that I was on the Board of Elections and I decided to give that up because that was another four-year term that was too long I don't want to be that old on anybody's board this is a short term process and I believe that I can make a difference if if we work collectively and if we be true to ourselves. There's too much disingenuous justness going on, and I am very, very disappointed this morning.

2:10:27 I really, but for the listening audience and for my family, thank you so very much for coming. My friends stuck it out with me, Ms. Joan Dawson. The others had to go back to work. But I really believe and I hope that this sixth constitutional convention will be the last. Enough of the government money is being spent and wasted. One minute.

2:10:54 Thank you all very much and let us get to work and be productive. Thank you, Delegate Hendricks. DELEGATE SILVERMAN GOOD AFTERNOON, FELLOW DELEGATES, GOOD AFTERNOON, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS AND FAMILY. BEFORE I BEGIN, I WANT TO RECOGNIZE MY WIFE, SUSAN SILVERMAN, SITTING BEHIND ME. WITHOUT HER SUPPORT, I WOULD NOT BE HERE TODAY. And it's encouraged me at all stages to stand up and to advocate for what I believe is the brightest future for the Virgin Islands. I'm proud and it is an honor to be in this group. But most of all, I feel very humbled to be sitting in a group of 14 other Virgin Islanders with brilliant histories in the legislation, in business, in all aspects of this territory, who are all equally committed to bringing a constitution forward to the people of the Virgin Islands. Yes, I had hoped for a different leadership, but I stand fully behind the leadership, which was duly elected. I am a collaborator by nature. I am an advisor by profession. And I really will put my best efforts towards trying to build bridges, to trying to find common ground, And most importantly, to trying to create a document which proposes the brightest possible future for all the people of the Virgin Islands, which has the highest chance of getting through the US Congress, and most importantly, is accepted by the millennials and the youth of this territory who will be the actual beneficiaries of our work.

2:12:54 One minute. So thank you all for admitting me into this body. and I will put my best efforts forward to achieve all those goals. Thank you. Thank you kindly, Delegate Sibleman, Delegate Stedman Hodge, Jr. Thank you, Mr. President. Greetings to the viewing and listening audience. First, I need to give some thank yous to my wife who's sitting ahead of me, Kay Fontaine Hodge, who's my real backbone, supporting me all the time. I have my aunt here, Gloria Davison, and her daughter, my cousin, Mune. My brother, Oliver Serafin, his father-in-law, they were here, and other folks as well. I want to recognize members of the Democratic Party that are here. Cida Rungdus, Boch Canero, Tony Green. Kudos for what you all do as relates to your clubs in the territory. But I want to really speak to the organization. There were a number of different meetings, and the one thing that really stood out, the one thing I always made sure I communicated was, we have to organize.

2:14:07 It took us over an hour to organize in here today, what should have happened from before. And I don't have to be the one to take charge or take over. I'm going to feed you the information, I'm going to guide you, and I'm going to be honest and forthright with you. but experience does matter. I want to share a personal experience of why this Sixth Constitutional Convention is necessary and why we need a document. Okay, because it's going to guide and organize government, governance. Last week, a vagrant, a homeless lady wanted to get back home, to leave the Virgin Islands, and I bought her a plane ticket to go back home. I saw my colleagues at the Department of Labor supported me had a very good friend of mine i've known for years say steady it really tight can't find a walk can't get a job can you buy me groceries that's how bad it is and then we speak to morale in government morale sucks and we know what's happening with other individuals and leadership getting salaries and doing their thing one minute we have work to do here and it's on behalf of the people of the virgin islands i don't run or manage anything and personalities and I'm also going to be straight up with you when I speak to you.

2:15:26 I believe in policies and procedures and most folks, they don't want to hear the truth. But I'm going to do my due diligence to work extremely hard on behalf of the people of Virgin Islands and those who know me, you know my character. I am my father's son. Speak like him, act like him, talk like him. And it's not going to change. I believe in us. I believe in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Thank you for the time, Mr. President. Thank you much, Delegate Stedman Hodge, Jr. Before we cross, as I want to recognize virtually, Delegate Alicia Wells.

2:16:03 As I see you on camera and on the screen right after Delegate Stedman Hodge, Jr. Delegate Wells. Good morning and thank you very much, Mr. President. I think this is the first time I can recall in the history of the Virgin Islands islands that there was a swearing in in any office virtually that's to show us how far we've come and that's to show us that we're moving in probably the right direction because no one needs to be physically present to have any work done i too had hoped for a different outcome this morning because i believe that the older heads should be holding up and giving information to the younger heads. Be that as it may, I want to congratulate the persons in the new administration. I want to say that the students who were there today, I hope that some of them are still in the chambers because all we need to write or send packages to the principals so they can probably have of those packages discussed in school with the

appropriate teacher for the classes. I believe that I am up to the job.

- 2:17:33 I too do not believe in personalities because everybody has his or her own personality that's given to us by God. And I'd like to segue for a minute and thank the people of the Virgin Islands for supporting me and voting for me as the at-large delegate. I'd also like to thank God for his presence in my life. And I can give you a whole story, but who won't say that it's a happy day here.
- 2:18:02 One minute. Thank you. I think that we have a group of strong headed persons. We're going to disagree a lot, I know, but at the end, I believe in October, we'll have our documents as demanded of us, and we'll be able to have it go through the process of getting approved. Thank you very much. Thank you, Delegate Wells.
- 2:18:36 Delegate Atura Watlington, Jr. good morning all congratulations to all the delegates I want to just say something quickly about what has happened in the past I had the honor of serving on the last constitutional convention with the fifth constitutional convention of Virgin Islands maybe the fourth in my adult life, I believe, or at least in the life that I can remember. It was a bullying experience in that we had a concept wherein a majority was formed and a minority was created. Today resembles the same process. I heard Delegate Hodge indicate that it was this organization or this body was organized in one hour this morning. I guess that instruction was only had between eight individuals. I spoke to many of the delegates in terms of what their likes, their dislikes, and what their preferences were and at least four of them told me four different stories so it doesn't matter our job is to try to stay away from the history of the fifth constitutional convention which failed on the issue of native rights as imani said many of us have ancestral heritage in the virgin islands
- 2:20:28 but it doesn't change the fact that all of us are created equal in the laws of the united states and the laws of the virgin islands so i hope and i genuinely hope that unlike the lack of sharing information but at least even sharing for disagreement purposes that is constitutional convention do not go down the same road so i wish everyone godspeed truthfulness and honesty and have a good day Thank you kindly, Delegate Watlington. We recognize Delegate Ronald Lee Russell.
- 2:21:21 Thank you, Mr. President. It's a momentous occasion. And congratulations to all of the delegates for being sworn in. on this arduous task of doing a constitution for the Virgin Islands. I want to thank my wife, Royette Russell, and thank my daughter, Ronakwa Russell. They were here today. And thank you for supporting me in this auspicious occasion. I want to ask the delegates to come together for the Virgin Islands. I hear that you don't like how it was formed, but we formed. And it's now time to get on to business.
- 2:22:23 The business is going to take us talking to each other, finding out the concerns of each delegate, getting to know each delegate, and operating like a team. Everybody know team. Super Bowl, they know teams. and don't let the formation derail you because the formation was done how it was done. You still have a responsibility to the people of these Virgin Islands. And regardless of how they formed in this occasion, we need to meet, speak, learn about each other, respect each other, and give each other the day of, the time of day regarding getting to know each other. Because 15 people in a big team to get along.
- 2:23:35 15 people should use all of the social media, social media, all of the resources to get to know each other. I am looking forward to working with everybody here to adapt a constitution for the Virgin Islands. Congratulations again. Thank you for coming. Thank you for participating. And I look forward to working with all of you. Thank you, Delegate Russell, Delegate John Canegader. I'd like to first thank God for just being here.
- 2:24:16 I'd like to thank my family and the people of the Virgin Islands who have entrusted me, you know, with potentially creating a document that could last for the rest of our history. Delegate Hendrix mentioned that there were many reasons that she chose to run. For me, there were many reasons I didn't want to run, but I only needed one reason, and that was to potentially create a document that could protect the people of the Virgin Islands. When I ran a little bit of campaign, and I did, I mentioned government and the teeth that they have. Well, this document has a potential to give the people back some of that teeth and remove some of that teeth from the government. I know some people might feel disenfranchised for how this was organized today.
- 2:24:59 I am not a politician, or at best I'm a bad politician, and I didn't like it either. But it is what it is, and this is what we have today. And I can promise my St. Thomas colleagues and my colleagues from St. John's that I am here to work with every single one of them. I am a team player. I was a hazmat captain. I ran for lieutenant governor when I had a female, Sir Raya Diasi-Kohlfeld, as a woman, so I have no issues with having a woman in leadership roles. Right now, I'm a supervisor planner. I work with people, and this is what I do. what I do I'm an expert troubleshooter I can honestly say I've never worked at something that failed and I don't expect this to be the first so I hope that we can come together put our personalities besides and work together as a team to create this document that we so desperately need in the Voyage and Islands thank you once again for your support and God bless you Thank You Thank you, Delegate Kandigata,

Delegate Rupert Ross, Jr.

- 2:25:59 Afternoon, Mr. President. Good afternoon. As I sit here, I reflect on my journey to today. I recall 44 years ago, coming into this hall as the president of the fourth Constitutional Convention to present a document to the people of the Virgin Islands and to the President and Congress of the United States, which they approve, only to return home to be defeated by the people over an issue that divided us.
- 2:26:51 I attempted to participate in the last Constitutional Convention and was unsuccessful. But God has blessed me with longevity and allowed me to be here for the six to accomplish my goal of having the people of the Virgin Islands adapt a constitution of their own choosing that they can amend and allow future generations to continue to mold and shape these islands for the betterment of the children and children's children you see these islands were not the way they are today when i came into this world people like before me struggled to change it to make it a better place for all of us One minute. And therefore, it is my lifelong ambition to leave this world, this Virgin Island, these Virgin Islands, a better place for people who reside here. And that is my sole mission. To my extended family from St. Thomas, and my living family in St. Croix, I stand before you ready to work with everyone to make sure at the end of this toil we produce a document worthy of the people of the Virgin Islands adapting and achieving the right to determine their own future without the interference of others. Thank you Mr. President.
- 2:28:46 Thank you, Delegate Ross. That's Rupert Ross, Jr. We now hear from Delegate Rudel Hodge, Jr. Thank you, Mr. President. Good afternoon, fellow delegates, distinguished guests, and virgin elders. First, I would like to take a moment to give thanks to God for His unwavering guidance, strength, and presence in my life. Without Him, none of this will be possible, and I'm deeply grateful. Today, as we embark on the monumental task of crafting the first constitution for the Virgin Islands, I am filled with a deep sense of purpose. This is our moment. It is our time to forge a path that reflects our values and ensures justice, equity, and opportunity for future generations. The work we do today will lay the foundation for the Virgin Islands Renaissance, one that strengthens our community and secures a brighter future for all. I want to begin by expressing my deep gratitude to my parents, Riddell A. Hodg Sr. and Jill Testamark.
- 2:29:56 Your wavering support and the values you instilled in me have shaped me into who I am today. Thank you for everything. To my grandmother, Joyce Lynn Gums Testamark, your wisdom, love, and guidance have shaped every chapter of my life. Your strength continues to inspire me to be better every day. To my grandfather, Joseph Blackie Testamark Sr., your legacy of pride, wisdom, and strength runs through me. Every step I take is because of you. To my grandfather, to my deceased grandfather, Mario Hodge, your drive, your discipline, and your belief in me continues to guide me. You push me to be the best version of myself and I honor your memory. And to my deceased grandmother, Julie Valero, your love, spirit, and wisdom remains with me always. I carry your influence with me in everything I do. A special thank you to Dr. Muta Abiff, whose brilliance has always inspired me to aim higher, to push harder, and to think bigger.
- 2:30:53 Your friendship and mentorship are invaluable to me. To Raul, thank you for being a driving force in my life, for being one of my closest friends and confidants. Your unwavering belief in me and the wisdom you have shared with me have had a profound impact on me. One minute. To my Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity brothers, I thank you for your loyalty, your brotherhood, and your unwavering support. Special thanks to all of my brothers who flew from New York to be here for this moment.
- 2:31:23 Many of you know me by different names, from Rudy with a Y to Rudy with an I, from RJ and even Ben Healy. These are names that are part of my journey that has shaped who I am today. Each name carries its own story, but no matter the name, I stand here the same person. determined, committed, and ready to serve the people of the Virgin Islands. As we begin this journey to create our Constitution, I am confident that together we will craft a document that will stand the test of time, a document that reflects the soul of our people, protect our rights, and ensure the success of future generations. Thank you. Thank you for your time and your trust in place in me. You can finish up. Thank you for your trust, your place in me. Let's forge ahead and make history.
- 2:32:13 Thank you, Delegate Rudel-Hodge Jr. And I'm struggling to make sure that they had moved the podium out of the way so I could see your face good, but I could still see you. Delegate Liliana Bellardo-DeO'Neal. Thank you Mr. Chairman, good afternoon to all, congratulations to all the members of this body and I'm looking forward to be working with each and every one of you. I must say that I feel like I am home because I sat in this chair for many, many, many years to serve the community of the Virgin Islands. And I understand I did a very good job. So I'm hoping that in this one, I can do the same. And with my experience and my knowledge that we can guide the younger individuals here as member of this body. And I'm sure that the people that have served before can train us because the Constitution is first for me for me and I will be learning just like my good friend here Mr. Hodge let me say that I am looking forward to working with all of you and I feel that with the experience of the people that have already served and with the knowledge and experience of

the younger people that are bringing to this body that we are going to have the last constitution convention because this one is going to pass and I believe that every one of us in this body is going to give a hundred percent of their time to put into this constitution so we don't have to come back here for the seventh because there will be no seventh this is it okay guys members ladies and gentlemen this is it we have a mission and a mission is to complete a document that will be accepted by the people of the Virgin Islands and we get we need to get them involved and we plan to get them involved a document that will be presented to the president of the legislature a document that will be accepted by the governor and last but not least we hope that our delegate can get it through Congress so that we can

- 2:34:41 have our Constitution, it is time for us to get our Constitution. I pray that all of us can work together, and I'm looking forward for the young people that are here, and I thank all of those young people that came here to see the process because they are the future, and we are stepping down, but when they are ready, we will step down. this point none of them came forward except two people here and to tell you the truth St. Thomas and John didn't have much interest in this conversation because most of them was write-in candidate we had to fill out the whole document we had to get signature from people in the Virgin Islands to run as delegate and St. Thomas just sit back and said nothing but write-in and I appreciate that they came out and write-in because I have some very good friends are writing but you know i'm going to say it how it is i said um thank you i said um i would like to say thank you to my husband my family and all my supporters and st croix who have always been there for me for the many years that i serve here for the many years that i've served in the board of election and now i'm serving in this precious constitutional convention thank you thank you madam mr chairman thank you senator lilyiana belardo d'oneil we we're we're in um we we're in point of um privileges point of order is there a rule being violated okay as as i was saying um mr silverman we we we mr mr silverman we will take up your point of order following the completion of the privilege of the floor that is that is
- 2:36:31 has not yet been completed that the chair the chair has ruled if you want to challenge the chair then make a motion to challenge the chair the chair has ruled all right I appreciate that thank you kindly delegate Johnny Abramson jr good morning all congratulations to all of you I'd like to thank my wife and my siblings Sean and Charlene I'd like to thank the people of St. Croix for electing me to this position I ain't saying much today because talk is cheap the issue is work i'm gonna stay right there let's go to work i done thank you delegate johnny abelson jr delegate devin carrington good uh good afternoon to all the people of the virgin islands listening and present i'd like to first thank my wife as well because she's been supportive of me in this endeavor and i'd like to thank the people of st croix who came out in substantial numbers indicating that they realized the seriousness of this process bob marley told us in song every man has the right to decide his own destiny This is a God-given right to be exercised by all people without outside interference. As this Sixth Constitutional Convention is part of the process of self-determination, I am honored to be a part of this endeavor.
- 2:38:28 In collaboration with my fellow delegates, who all I congratulate, I look forward to crafting a document that is forward-looking and that takes into account not only our current political status, but that anticipates and is adaptable to any future steps in self-determination and self-governance that we inevitably grow and develop into.
- 2:39:05 Thank you, Delegate Devin Carrington, and allow me to begin by expressing my thanks and gratitude to the members of the Sixth Constitutional Convention, that in their determination that they find it fit to allow me to preside over this body but I want to first begin with some acknowledgments I do want to acknowledge my partner and confident Tanya Singh that is sitting over to my left and I also want to give some other acknowledgments that I think in a discussion and and the statements being shared that um there are some pertinent points that are being missed and so for me the acknowledgments I want to to begin with I want to acknowledge the former delegate to Congress, Donna Christensen, who on two occasions provided an opportunity for Virgin Islanders like myself in the first instance as chairman of the ICM territorial committee to appear before
- 2:40:57 Congress on the subject matter that is the foundation of which these this Constitution stands on which is public law 94-584 a forum I shared with the late Charles Wesley Turnbull, our former governor, former chair of the Democratic Party, James A. O'Brien Jr., former national committeeman of the Republican Party, the late Helen Redfield.
- 2:41:35 And so the discussion and the revitalization of this discussion as mentioned by Delegate Ross how long ago it was that we had a fourth constitutional convention was revived before a congressional House committee to address the lack of existing Constitution for both Guam and the Virgin Islands of United States which is our legal title and that took place on June 6 of 2001 I again what was fortunate to the efforts of our delegate to again appear before a house Congressional Committee by invitation representing this legislative body in my capacity as minority leader on March 17 2010 when representatives from the legislature were invited the president the majority leader and the minority leader but only I went not to speak of the content of the fifth Constitution document but to speak on the rights of those persons that we had elected to serve as members and delegates of the Constitutional Convention irrespective of whether or not you or I agree with their position and or the content they were acting and serving on behalf of the voting public and I urge Congress to

respect that right to allow the document to come back to the people of the Vaughan Islands and allow the people of the Vaughan Islands to vote it up or down I'm gonna share some of these and I think it's important because I I am

2:43:48 somewhat at a loss when you listen to the discussion of a decision-making process amongst a group bigger than one. This is our organizations. We have a constitutional convention with 60 members. Mr. Ross can help me as I am a young one 60 today we have the fortunate opportunity as delegates to be really relegated to a body and a number of 15 of where in my mind I can assure you there will be disagreements that we will not all concur on certain points of of a document but one with the experience of dealing with groups and organizations as I've presided not over this legislature I've presided over a 24 member body in the Caribbean a 45 member body in the Americas North America South America Central America including United States and Canada represented I have solved in the capacity of creating a governance document for over two hundred and twelve national federations known to most of you as countries at the international level it is that experience I intend to bring to share to ensure the concerns the ideas the issues of everyone is equally heard but rest assured that when the dime falls on the floor it requires a

2:45:36 majority of us to agree and I so wholeheartedly accept the efforts of the legislature in their attempts and their success in bringing out a document because it wasn't genius in what they did but it was righteous in what they did requires at least nine members to be present to have a quorum why nine because we don't want seven st. Croix delegates and one at large delegate or seven st. Thomas st. John delegates and one at large the delegate get together sit at a table we have eight away and eight is a quorum nine ensures that there's no way a quorum can be established without at least one person from that district being present. That is genius, that is transparency, that is equality. These things are necessary. I just started with the, and y'all please bear with me because I intend to at least drive my points home and exercise the privilege of the chair as president. I want to acknowledge the League of Women Voters that provide an opportunity for all registered candidates for public office, in this case, delegate to congress to giving us an opportunity to speak to the people and the voters i want to also acknowledge um the supervisor election was here earlier so i want to acknowledge the election system of the virgin islands and the supervisor deputies that hosted in the election system office in both St. Thomas and

2:47:41 St. Croix for the lack of a better term orientation sessions for candidates for the delegate to the Constitutional Convention. I attended irrespective of the fact that I may have taught in my mind having served on the board of the election for, what would it be, three times four is still 12? And ten years as the chairman of the joint board of elections and two years as the district board chair. I attended. And it was the process that the election system conducted that allowed me, a mere candidate, not even a candidate at that time, Marianne and Jancu public to attend their orientation session and to discover and to offer to the election system some concerns that needed to be redressed in the law. I asked Senate President Novel Francis who is sitting there that after those session the election system came back to the legislature and requested certain changes to the law for the Constitutional Convention and so I don't someone permission to offer advice in a forum as a citizen to ensure that the process is fair and equal and provide access and availability to the voters of our territory and that's why I'm thankful that they had that because we pointed those things out. Now on the other subject matter and I want to thank these other three individuals. I don't know what Jamila Russell called her show. I don't know what Mario Moorhead called his show. I know what Sinclair Williams called his show. VI in the morning. And so as a concerned candidate, I didn't want to go on the ballot and want you to vote for me because you recognize my name, Ussi Raymond Richards, and I cast in a vote for me based on popular recognition of a name, I paid for our three times to talk

2:50:10 questions about why I am running, why I believe I've earned your vote, what is a constitution, and why we need our own constitution. It wasn't out of the interest about who's gonna get the most votes it's about respecting the voters educating and informing the voters about the process and more importantly to encourage the voters in a district of St. Croix where we had over 14 or 15 candidates running for seven seats to encourage the voters to go to that page and the ballot if you're there on the machine you have to swipe right through if you get a paper ballot you have to flip it over to find us from St. Croix that are here today and we have we have to at least educate our people if we didn't let them know what a constitution is that we are delegates why do we expect them to be informed and to vote for us after the fact and just oh yeah I know that why devin carrington he's a delegate now let me give devin a vote we can't condone that kind of behavior in our community i want to specifically thank the the former senate president and this is no affront to no one certain novel francis and the the members of the the 35th legislature because when we reviewed a law after we got elected we saw we saw

2:52:07 concerns a majority of us and the majority of us signed a letter addressed to Senate president Novel Francis outlining some concerns in a lot that we thought needed to be addressed even before we were sworn in here today you the concern that would ensure that you and I who are sitting within this well as members of the Constitutional Convention is blessed with the autonomy the freedom to determine who our legal counsel gonna be than to have a law that tell me we go use a

legal counsel one from the legislature one from the governor's office one from the VI bar we are advocating autonomy and and was being strapped with a mandate like that thank you Senator Francis and thank Senator Diane Capehart because I saw she she moved that amendment on your behalf during the session I'll be done shortly the is a distinct African proverb that that I think that ought to also be shared with here today and I share it with the intent of it being gender-neutral But the African proverb says that the father places his son on his shoulder so that the son could say father down the road.

2:54:01 So this is what we intend to do today from our youthful members, our youthful community, is to place them on our shoulders so that they could see farther down the road and begin to have a thorough working understanding of the process of governance and in this case governance in the virgin islands my my last little note so you all could be blessed with knowing that i'll be finished now and and we we we do it um all the time and i think we we should all be conscious of it because we we give thanks to god we give thanks to ja we give thanks to allah by whatever name you want to call your most high power but you you really can't access that most high power unless you truly believe and believe requires faith and faith requires action we are here today with the intent to I always share this little story from this book entitled on the steps we took by the Arthur John McHugh he gave a little example about three frogs sitting on a log and one of the frogs decided to jump and the teacher asked the classroom so

2:56:00 students so how many frogs was it was left and it's cheering them jump over the two frogs left the teacher said no that's the wrong answer there was three frogs sitting on a log and one decided to jump so how many frogs were left and again they continue oh teachers too teacher says your answer is wrong so the answer is there were still three frogs sitting on a log because the frog decided to jump didn't mean a fraud took the action of jumping it requires action and we are here today to encourage all of us collectively to take action with some sort of open mind and understanding because as I said been there done that and I am assured as I sit here today that each and every one of of us may have an opinion that some one of us may disagree about but that doesn't give us the license to be disagreeable that give us a license to discuss and to come to consensus it is my hope and intention to ensure that we engage in a process that allows us to orderly discuss, share, and come to a decision-making process.

2:57:41 And that's my sole intent of accepting and sitting in this capacity today. I know my past experiences, I'm usually a different participant when I'm sitting down there in comparison to sitting up here. And so I'm pleased to be the traffic director, for the lack of a better term, to let you know when the light is green, when the light turns red, and then to ask you, warn you, when the yellow light come on, it's time for caution. And that's my sole purpose for being here today. I want to congratulate each and every single delegate. I want to say here an objection of a point of order. And when you have a point of order, Mr. President out there and the other presidents that may be around ask you, so what rule is being violated, members? Within the next 14 days, we're going to be meeting to adopt rules.

2:59:02 I can't violate no rules and we ain't got no rules. So we will proceed and do that. I expect that the officers, myself as president, will try to work with the Vice-President Stedmar Hodge, Jr., the Secretary, Mahani Daniel, and the Treasurer, John Abramson, Jr., so that we could quickly sit down and put forth a map to engage and to assure that each and every one of the 15 members can have a direction agreed upon so that we could move we thank you I thank you for this opportunity and I thank you for indulging with me what you call it delegate in my monologue but in my statement I think it may have been necessary and thank you all again hearing on I just went you with you there's no point of order if you did not know no no rules yes but the point of order is not the point of order is in regards to could you grab your microphone the point of order is in regards to Resolution 001 which was improperly brought before this body section 4 of that resolution states that the rules governing the organization and operation of the Sixth Constitutional Convention of the Virgin Islands of the United States are as set forth in the document titled Rules of the Sixth Constitutional Convention which are attached to and by this reference made a part of this resolution. Mr. Chairman, none of us have seen the rules of the Sixth Constitutional Convention. They were not distributed they were not a part of this document and so that leaves me wondering what have we actually adopted in resolution zero zero one that was my question and point of order thank you sir thank you delegate silverman please

3:01:17 note that the statues and the process of Robert Zula also provide for a 14 day limit by which to complete the rules and regulations today and that is why I mentioned that within the next few days we were sure within 14 days to meet again for all of us to have the rules before us and review them thank you kindly I'm hearing no further discussion this session is here by recess not a John yeah and recess mean that the session is still in at the call of the president so we will cover this subject matter under the recess rule of Robert's rules of order. Have a pleasant day.

3:02:27 Thank you. We'll be right back.

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke · only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

- 11x **Delegate Stedman Hodge Jr.**
heard in this transcript as: Hodge, Hodge Jr., Steadman Hodge Jr., Stedman Hodge Jr
- 2x **Senator Diane T. Capeheart**
heard in this transcript as: Diane Capehart
- 2x **Senator Novelle Francis**
heard in this transcript as: Francis
- 2x **Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach**
heard in this transcript as: Roach