

Honorary Doctorate

The Honorable Ron de Lugo

Ron de Lugo was only 26 years old in November, 1956, when he won his first election to the U.S. Virgin Islands Legislature. Like all his elections to local and federal offices throughout his career, this was for an at-large seat from the District of St. Thomas. For the next 38 years, until his retirement from the U.S. Congress in 1994, de Lugo played a pivotal role in the social, economic and political development of his Virgin Islands community. He worked tirelessly to expand the rights of all who live in these islands and, as his influence grew in the United States Congress, he was able to advance the interests of fellow Americans in all the insular areas and offshore commonwealths of the United States.

From 1948-1950 he served in the U.S. Army and was program director and announcer for the Armed Forces Radio Service in Puerto Rico. After discharge he helped launch St. Thomas radio station WSTA. In 1952, he sparked the revival of Carnival, one of the Virgin Islands' greatest cultural phenomena.

He was elected to four terms in the Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands, from 1956-1960 and from 1962-1966, interspersed by an appointment as St. Croix Administrator from 1961-1962. He was a member of the Democratic National Committee from 1959-1966. A growing network of national political alliances led to Congress giving the people of the Virgin Islands the right to elect their own governor in 1968 for the first time in history. In 1968, de Lugo was elected to the first of two terms as Washington Representative. In November of 1972, de Lugo was elected the first Congressional Delegate from the U.S. Virgin Islands and served ten terms, achieving sufficient seniority by 1989 to become Chairman of the Interior Subcommittee on Insular and International Affairs.



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Congressman de Lugo had many accomplishments including securing federal pensions for former VICORP employees, inclusion of the Virgin Islands in the federal Airport Development Aid Program that ensured sufficient funding to complete expansion of Cyril E. King Airport, major improvements to Henry E. Rohlsen Airport, expansion of Crown Bay Dock and reconstruction of the Frederiksted Pier. He was instrumental in securing state-like treatment for the Virgin Islands under the Federal Highway System, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other federal agencies. He also sought protection of the Territory's unique status outside the U.S. Customs Zone. This included duty-free allowances for visitors, exemption from Jones Act shipping restrictions, mirror tax investment incentives and the rum excise taxes.

His other accomplishments included passing legislation formally designating the University of the Virgin Islands as one of the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities. His Alien Adjustment Act of 1982 brought resolution to the long-standing, divisive issues caused by the uncertain status of temporary workers by making them and their families eligible for U.S. citizenship. He legislated the title transfers of Water Island to the Virgin Islands, the National Park on Hassel Island, and the creation of a National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve at the Columbus Landing Site at Salt River. His bills also brought to the people of the Virgin Islands a Supreme Court appellate system and jurisdiction over its surrounding submerged lands.

In his last term, a long-held goal was realized when the then Speaker of the House Thomas C. Foley agreed to give congressional delegates from the territories and the District of Columbia the right to vote in the Committee of the Whole in the House during the 103rd Congress. He retired from public office in 1994. In 2003, the Federal Building in St. Thomas was named in his honor. He lives on St. Thomas with his wife, Sheila Paiewonsky de Lugo. Between them they have four children, seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren. De Lugo remains a friend and counselor to the people of all insular areas, and above all, to his Virgin Islands community to which he dedicated his career in public service.

Fiftieth

Commencement



ST. THOMAS

Saturday, the Seventeenth of May
Two Thousand and Fourteen
Seven O'Clock in the Evening
Sports and Fitness Center
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

ST. CROIX

Sunday, the Eighteenth of May
Two Thousand and Fourteen
Half after Two O'Clock in the Afternoon
Campus Grounds
St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands