REMARKS BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR JOHN A. CARVER, JR. AT DEDICATION CEREMONIES FOR THE OSWALD E. HARRIS HOUSING PROJECT, ST. THOMAS, VIRGIN ISLANDS -- JUNE 2, 1963

I am glad to be back in the lovely Virgin Islands and to take this part in this auspicious occasion. The Oswald E. Harris Court public housing project -- its design, and unsurpassable physical setting, indeed its entire conception -- is one of the most attractive and beautiful projects I have ever seen -- public or private. You are justly proud of this achievement, Governor, and I extend my sincerest congratulations, and those of the Interior Department, to you, to the Chairman, members and employees of the Virgin Islands Housing Authority, to the Department of Housing and Community Renewal, and to all those who made possible this attractive and most necessary addition to St. Thomas.

I remember so well what Governor Paiewonsky said in his inaugural address, delivered in historic Emancipation Garden of St. Thomas two years ago. It was then my happy duty also of representing the Secretary of the Interior Department, and my first trip to these Islands. The Governor expressed his deep concern with the housing situation in these islands; and he stated that slum clearance and better housing for the lower and middle income groups would receive his immediate attention. He has since reiterated, in word and deed, that he considers housing not merely the Number 1 problem of the islands, but the Numbers 1, 2 and 3 problems in terms of need and priority.

The Department of the Interior is as concerned as your Governor -- as all of you here today must be -- in the yet serious housing needs of these islands. We have been working closely with your local officials, offering to them our help and noting the substantial progress which has been made.

We are particularly impressed with the broad and imaginative approach which is evidenced in the vigorous response to this challenge. There is no reliance on any one particular method -- such as the public housing project which we dedicate today -- sorely needed though it is. Solutions to the housing plight and housing blight of this territory won't be solved by slavish adherence to rigid formulas.
We applaud, for example, the development of a middle-income project at the Altona site here on St. Thomas. We hope that this blighted area may soon be cleared. We note, too, the recent transfer of 75 acres on St. Croix for homestead purposes, and the real and substantial progress at last being made in the renewal and clearance of the Water Gut and Lagoon Street areas in St. Croix and in the Barracks Yard area in St. Thomas. Tenants of Barracks Yard will soon be moving into this healthful and beautiful project where we stand today. We have been following closely the plans for a middle-income project on the truly outstanding site on Bluebeard's Hill in front of us, which will be constructed by a local non-profit private corporation, with the cooperation of the Government of the Virgin Islands and with a substantial loan from the United States Government. This entirely new concept for the Virgin Islands will be a welcome addition to the housing picture in St. Thomas. Last, but by no means least, we are aware of the help, the cooperation, the encouragement which has been given to the private sector in housing development, and are happy to observe what is apparently a breakthrough in this area -- with projects being planned in both St. Thomas and St. Croix.

Adequate housing does not arise like the phoenix from the rubble of cleared slums. We are acutely aware of the delays encountered in this particular project. Apart from delays of construction, time is consumed by the planning process which must be done wisely if the project is to fit in appropriately with intelligent development of the community.

In the Virgin Islands, we see this process of sound planning facilitated by a reorganization of the present Virgin Islands Housing Authority and Virgin Islands Urban Renewal Authority, the creation of a new Department of Housing and Urban Renewal, the enactment of zoning laws, and the drafting of a Master Plan for community development, and by other steps vital to proper and orderly development. We witness today the kind of fruit which these endeavors will bear.

The mainland continues to view the startling statistics of material progress in the Virgin Islands -- in revenues, in tourism, in building permits, in demand for water and power. Yet, the statistics of growth and progress of material activity, must not divert attention from the fact that the ordinary citizen of the Virgin Islands continues too long to live in substandard housing. We will all have failed, if we flag in our efforts to see that American citizens resident in the Virgin Islands are offered decent, adequate and economical housing. This Administration tolerates no double standard in the setting of our goals -- be they goals of medical care, housing or otherwise -- for the territories of the United States. We do not think of one pattern of housing as being for the mainland and of another "good enough" for the territories -- there is only one goal here, and that is the opportunity for adequate housing within his means for every American citizen. I think the Oswald E. Harris Court project which we dedicate today meets this test and that is why it is such a great pleasure to participate in these ceremonies today.
To meet such housing goals — the only ones tolerable for any American community — will take work and cooperation. It can be done, and under Governor Paiwonsky's leadership and with the cooperation of this community and the Federal Government, it will be done.

The assumption of large-scale public responsibility for decent housing standards for its citizens is a sign of social and political maturity in any community. It is an important step in the process of bringing things into balance. No community will long survive under democratic ideals when it ignores the basic needs of its citizens. You have taken a long step forward in demonstrating your full capacity to assume these heavy incidents of citizenship.

More than two years ago on the occasion of Governor Paiwonsky's inauguration, I stated for the Administration the conviction of such capacity, and the Virgin Islands has lived up to that confidence. A year ago, we again underscored our firm belief in your capacity by recommending broad advances in control over local affairs, both political and economic.

These improvements have not yet come to pass. Increased self-government eventually will prevail, but I must emphasize the part you as Virgin Islanders must play in this process.

As compared to the 180 million people of the whole United States and all their economic and social problems, this territory is a relatively small segment of our total national responsibility. But I can assure you that Federal interest, both executive and legislative, is focused on your affairs to a degree completely out of proportion to comparative size. You are literally under a spotlight and microscope, and the smallest incidents are examined in larger than life detail.

In a way you should be very proud of this rather strange phenomenon. It stems, in part at least, from the fact that any mainland official who visits these islands goes away with indelible impressions of natural beauty, warm hospitality and magnificent potential. We tend to "keep in touch" and may come to regard ourselves as "experts" on island affairs. Some, indeed, are prone to make important judgments on the basis of the latest press accounts of your legislative deliberations or your political oratory — or mere rumors of such. Such goings-on in Pocatello, Idaho or Manitowoc, Wisconsin — communities of comparable size — wouldn't even ripple the surface of official Washington's aplomb. A report from St. Thomas attracts the immediate attention of many people having substantial influence on official policies.

This places a high premium on responsible conduct in public affairs. You have a great reservoir of good will — in my Department, in the
White House, in the Congress. But every case of irresponsible public comment -- whether by circulation of baseless rumor, partisan political distortion, veiled innuendo, or journalistic sleight of hand -- draws down that reservoir. It demeans the whole community and detracts from the effort to advance its interests.

I believe that this kind of self-serving irresponsibility deserves the strongest public censure. Each citizen must become personally responsible for evaluating the wildly excessive statements that have had currency. Such detractions should be promptly denounced and exposed.

We demand honesty in government. We ask no less of its critics. We insist upon the rights of the minority. We require that this not be used to defeat the will of the majority. Official censorship can never be tolerated; good taste and decency cannot be legislated. But the sound moral sense of each individual must act as censor. When hate and malice are disbelieved, their purveyors will revert to responsible conduct -- or disappear. In either event, the community image will improve.

The Virgin Islands stand as a major symbol of the American system before the world. There is every motivation toward vastly increased measures of self-government. But this can be achieved only through effective partnership action. The community must hold up its end by demonstrating its maturity. The local government must weigh its decisions in the whole context of national interest. We are willing to refrain from interference in purely local affairs, while advancing the cause of an ever-increasing sphere of local control, but such self-denial is in a bureaucratic sense unnatural; and it becomes impossible if our entry into purely local matters is requested or demanded. Actions on the part of any of these partners which can be misconstrued by our cold war adversaries will be damaging to all of us -- and to the entire free world.

One cannot have faith in the future of man and democratic institutions without reliance on general good will. We shall watch for the scoundrels and quarantine them away from the general population, but we adhere to the fundamental belief that they are abnormal. Such a philosophy leads to events like this, evidencing genuine community concern for the welfare of all its citizens. Let us broaden its perspective to permit differences without rancor, opposition without character assassination, contest without conflict.

Governor Paiiewonsky, this project has been too long in materializing. It is to your credit that it is finally ready to fill a great need. Surely it symbolizes the changing face of the Territory. Just as you struggled to unsnarl this project, you have opened many other avenues to improve the well-being of all the people. More than 300 families will live more comfortably and enjoy better health by virtue of this project. But more than 30,000 people are more in your debt than they will ever know for the devotion, energy, endless hours and deep concern you have contributed to their welfare.
It is even more to your credit that you have done so while furnishing the finest example of the public conduct standards I have just mentioned. To paraphrase the operetta, "The politician's life is not a peaceful one" and he develops a capacity to absorb the slings and arrows of criticism. At times you have served beyond the call of duty in this respect -- beyond the decent bounds of "fair comment" that public policy allows as to those in public life. Yet your dignity remains and your forebearance and tolerance have prevailed over the temptation retaliate in kind.

Your high ideals of public service contribute not only to the success of your local administration but to the ultimate achievement of the Territory's governmental aspirations.

We all share the hope you expressed in your inaugural address two years ago -- that you might be the last appointive governor. But until that change is made, every citizen of this Territory should recognize the good fortune which befell the islands in the selection of its last appointed executive. May you indeed serve and bring increased prosperity to these already gifted islands until a successor shall have been elected and qualified.