

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Donna M. Christensen

1945–

DELEGATE

DEMOCRAT FROM THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

1997–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Delegate Donna M. Christensen won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1997, the first woman to represent the U.S. Virgin Islands, a multi-island territory in the eastern Caribbean. The islands became part of the United States when they were purchased from Denmark in 1917. Since 1973, the territory has had nonvoting representation in the House of Representatives.¹ During her tenure, Christensen has focused on improving the social, political, and economic dynamics of the islands, especially as they relate to federal issues.

Donna Christensen was born on September 19, 1945, to the late chief judge of the Virgin Islands District Court, Almeric Christian, and Virginia Sterling Christian. She earned a bachelor of science degree from St. Mary's College at Notre Dame in 1966 and an M.D. from George Washington University School of Medicine in 1970. In addition to running an active family practice, Christensen worked as a health administrator, rising to the position of assistant commissioner of health for the Virgin Islands.

Concurrently, she began her political career in 1980 as part of the Coalition to Appoint a Native Judge, which emphasized judicial appointments from within the community, and later on as part of the Save Fountain Valley Coalition, which called for the protection of St. Croix's north side from overdevelopment. She served as Democratic National Committeewoman from 1984 to 1994, as vice chair of the Territorial Committee of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, and as a member of the Platform Committee of the Democratic National Committee. From 1984 to 1986, she served as a member of the Virgin Islands Board of Education and was appointed to the Virgin Islands Status Commission from 1988 to 1992.

Christensen lost her first bid for Delegate to Congress in 1994, failing to secure the Democratic nomination. Two years later, she not only won the party's nomination, but also went on to defeat freshman Independent incumbent Victor Frazer after a three-way general election and a runoff election. In 1997, as a Member of the 105th Congress (1997–1999), she became the first female physician to serve in the House. Christensen has since won re-election to the House with at least 62 percent of the vote.²

As a Member of the House, she has served on the Natural Resources Committee, which oversees the affairs of the offshore territories, where she is chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs and the third-ranking Democrat on the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands. She has also served on the Small Business Committee and, during the 108th Congress (2003–2005), gained a seat on the Committee on Homeland Security, primarily because of her expertise in public health.

Christensen has focused on strengthening the Virgin Islands' economy and stabilizing its fiscal condition. Expanding traditional tax incentives that are central to the economy of the Virgin Islands and introducing legislation to encourage fiscal discipline have been the hallmarks of her tenure. She also has worked to expand business, housing, health, and educational opportunities in the territory.

Delegate Christensen, a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, chairs the Health Braintrust and has been at the forefront of efforts to end health disparities, fight the HIV/AIDS threat both nationally and internationally, and extend health insurance coverage to as many Americans as possible.

Delegate Christensen is married to Christian O. Christensen of St. Croix and has two daughters from a previous marriage, Rabiah and Karida Green, and three grandchildren, Nia Hamilton, Kobe George, and Nealia Williams.³ She has four stepchildren from her 1998 marriage to Christian O. Christensen: Lisa, Esther, Bryan and David.

FOR FURTHER READING

“Christensen, Donna Marie Christian,” *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000380>.

NOTES

- 1 “America’s Caribbean Paradise: History and Geography,” http://www.house.gov/christianchristensen/vi_history.htm (accessed 29 December 2004).
- 2 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html; *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2007): 1131; “Official Biography of Donna M. Christensen,” <http://www.house.gov/christian-christensen/biography.htm> (accessed 3 December 2007).
- 3 “Official Biography of Donna M. Christensen”; *Politics in America, 2006* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2005): 1142.