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Op-Ed: Give Jackie her Jacket - An Analysis of the Delegate to Congress Position

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett.

Recent opinions related to the work of the Virgin Islands' congressional representative present an opportunity for the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands to share information regarding both the function and role Virgin Islands Delegate Stacey Plaskett.

The Virgin Islands of the United States has sent a delegate to the US House of Representatives since 1973. Like all territorial delegates throughout American history (delegates for territories and non-states have served as early as 1790 in the Congress), the sole representative has the job of advocating for his or her constituents skillfully in both chambers of Congress. While this work is made more difficult by not having full voting privileges and no Senate counterparts; it is

inaccurate that delegates have no voting privileges. Delegates have limited voting privileges in the House. Delegates, like all members have full voting privileges in their respective Committee assignments. And while territorial members of Congress do not vote on final passage of legislation, they do vote on the Floor when the House is in Committee of the Whole. Delegates introduce legislation, cosponsor other members' legislation, debate and offer speeches on the floor, and can be elected and/or appointed to leadership positions. Delegates also act as the representative of their constituents to the federal agencies.

Delegate Plaskett is a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, the Ports Caucus, the Caribbean Caucus and others. Since being elected to Congress, the Delegate has also been a member of the New Democratic Coalition, which is the caucus of moderate, business-minded, pragmatic Democrats. Moreover, she is only the fourth Black woman and the only member from a territory to ever serve on the Ways and Means Committee – arguably the most powerful committee in Congress. Being on the Ways and Means Committee allowed the Delegate's office in the last Congress to place language in Committee bills that were signed into law, such as: to forgive our territory's \$300 million Community Disaster Loan debt; make permanent our new ratios of Medicaid which has allowed 20,000 more Virgin Islanders to receive healthcare; provide equal treatment for the Virgin Islands in the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit by providing for full federal funding these tax benefits to Virgin Islanders permanently; and give the Virgin Islands a disproportional amount to other states and territories of funding under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021—an over \$500 million check from Treasury.

The Democrat Party is the dominant party in the Virgin Islands and it is inevitable that the representative in Washington would disproportionately be and/or caucus with House Democrats. The Delegate is a Democrat, unapologetically, and her background as a former prosecutor is called on by the National Democrat party leadership to support its platform, and her ability to work in a bipartisan manner is evident if one were to look at the legislation she has been able to effectuate this term with Republicans controlling Congress.

Delegate Plaskett is now in her 5th term, hard at work representing the interests of ALL VIRGIN ISLANDERS – on local, national, and international issues. It is apparent that those individuals who make attempts to diminish her role and accomplishments fall into four categories: 1) those who are unaware 2) those who don't want to know 3) those who choose to spread misinformation 4) those that want to see a community torn apart for their own need or personal gain.

The Congresswoman and her team are constantly looking for ways to share the work that they are doing and what more can be done to advance us as a territory. Yet, there is a small group of individuals who want any Virgin Islands representative to remain hat in hand, small minded and grateful for dregs. That small group does not understand that the spirit of Virgin Islanders who have bled for this country and who have been instrumental in building the economies of Europe and the US, demands to be heard.

We have earned the right to be heard, not just on issues of our self-determination, but on other issues like world hunger and climate change, and even the right to voice our disdain for a wouldbe fascist President. That narrow-minded group does not understand that we Virgin Islanders have a way of making the most with little and being greater than they want us to be— nevertheless, our Delegate continues to do great things and we will continue to stand with her as she champions our territory's cause in Washington.

The Delegate's website (plaskett.house.gov) lists over a dozen bills that she is leading with Republicans, along with other bipartisan accomplishments in this Congress.

Submitted on *Wednesday, July 19, 2024 by former Senator Stedman Hodge, current state chair of the V.I. Democratic Party.*

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