

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett Responds to Bryan's 6th SOTA, Hones in on Utilization of Federal Funds

Acknowledging progress, addressing challenges: Plaskett on efficient use of USVI disaster recovery funds

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett

Moments after Governor Albert Bryan Jr. delivered this year's State of the Territory address on Monday evening, Consortium journalists caught up with Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett for her assessment of his remarks.

"One thing you have to say [is] that he is a determined person," Ms. Plaskett noted. "He moves forward, he really looks for opportunities. And I think that this was part of what we

saw in today's State of the Territory Address."

She gave praise to her staff for contributing to the territory's success in attracting the mass amounts of federal funding that is being used to power the USVI's recovery, noting that efforts from her office have resulted in laws being adjusted to allow the territory to receive expedited funding, among other things.

However, the congresswoman echoed Governor Bryan's concerns about being able to expend the approximately \$8.5 billion in obligated funds quickly enough. "Of that funding \$3.1 [billion] is the amount that's been spent, that leaves over \$5 billion that has been obligated but has not yet been spent," Ms. Plaskett noted.

She also noted that additional funds which have not yet been obligated, approximately \$15 billion all told, would require a hefty investment from the territory to meet matching fund requirements – in the ballpark of \$1.5 billion. Waivers of the match requirements are being sought for critical infrastructure projects such as schools, hospitals and police stations, Delegate Plaskett noted. Nevertheless, "Washington is going to require to see that we are very judicious with our funds," she noted, "because they use the 10 percent match to really hold people accountability." The requirement for local governments to put up some of their own money is so that project costs don't balloon out of control, she explained.

Ms. Plaskett heralded Governor Bryan's vow to develop a comprehensive, long-term cash management strategy as a "brilliant idea," but said that she was awaiting further clarity on the plan. "Like so many things, you want to know the details," Ms. Plaskett observed. "What will be different? What will be done to ensure that this money actually gets pushed out," she asked, against the backdrop of recent news that millions of dollars in obligated federal grant dollars have been [sitting unclaimed](#) by various government agencies.

The congresswoman said that she is looking forward to seeing the executive branch work to implement its plans while the Legislature serves to implement checks and balances, promoting transparency and good governance as Governor Bryan implements his development agenda.