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Congresswoman Plaskett Leads Passage of Pioneering DiasporaLink Act

The Act aims to forge direct internet link between America and Africa via USVI

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The U.S. House of Representatives has passed H.R. 3385, also known as the DiasporaLink Act. The measure, championed by Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett, directs the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information to conduct a feasibility study on developing a trans-Atlantic submarine fiber optic cable that would connect the United States directly to Africa through the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"This is a significant step to establish a high-speed internet connection to Africa and throughout the Caribbean from American soil, which will enhance America's national security data and communication interests in the regions," Ms. Plaskett remarked as she celebrated the bill's passage

and highlighted the potential benefits of the DiasporaLink Act for both national security and economic development. They study would also examine the strategic importance of such a connection to the Virgin Islands, and also look at how it aligns with American interests in the region.

“Presently, there is no direct fiber optic link between the U.S. and the continent of Africa. Africa is increasingly an area that presents dynamic economic opportunity for our country as well as national security challenges that must be addressed. U.S. reliance on other foreign and commercial entities to connect to Africa is a compromising position for the United States,” the congresswoman remarked. The initiative is expected to enhance national security data and communication, stimulate job creation, and promote interconnectedness between the U.S. and the African continent.

Situating the proposed connectivity hub in the U.S. Virgin Islands would serve to leverage the islands' geostrategic location for the benefit of the U.S. and its territories, Ms. Plaskett said. "DiasporaLink in the USVI will facilitate our islands as a hub for commerce in the global digital economy and will stimulate high-tech job opportunities for Virgin Islanders and attract digital users to the territory," she stated, emphasizing the transformative impact this project could have on the local economy and digital infrastructure.

The legislation also acknowledges past efforts in telecommunications infrastructure, such as the GlobalCrossing cables in St. Croix, and highlights the need for a federally maintained link to ensure reliability and longevity for future connectivity projects.

Ms. Plaskett extended her gratitude to Stephan Adams, CEO of viNGN for his crucial role in conceptualizing DiasporaLink, as well as to Congressman Russ Fulcher (R-Idaho) and House Energy & Commerce Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone (D-New Jersey) for their bipartisan support and leadership.

As the DiasporaLink Act moves to the Senate for a vote, its passage could herald a new era of digital connectivity and economic opportunity, not just for the Virgin Islands, but for the United States and its connections across the Atlantic to Africa.