

Plaskett Op-Ed — Why Virgin Islanders Must Demand a Seat at the Table: The Fight for Representation at the DNC

In her op-ed, Plaskett highlights the crucial role of Virgin Islanders at the DNC, stressing that their presence ensures the territory's unique challenges are recognized and addressed at the highest levels of national decision-making

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V.I. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett.

Recently, there has been conversation in certain circles about the value of Virgin Islanders—who do not have the right to vote for President of the United States—attending the Democratic National Convention.

We had a fantastic team of Virgin Islanders who represented us so well at this year's Democratic National Convention. I saw them attending various, substantive caucus meetings; some were part of the Platform Committee to make sure we were included in policy positions and engaged delegates and even Cabinet members on issues that we all find important – from our full voting rights and representation, to education, healthcare inclusion, and many other issues.

Also for me, going to the Democratic National Convention is NOT to listen to speeches, attend parties, be in a crowd - the speeches are better watched on television, I am NOT a celebrity watcher, I don't like loud music, food and drinks are better in my house, and I can't take too much small talk (seriously it annoys me).

Going to the convention is about letting decision-makers know we are present and NOT to be forgotten, meeting with individuals who can be allies for issues important to Virgin Islanders – voting rights, development of our home, policies that advance our future, making sure our children have more opportunities, letting people know of VI excellence.

It's about reminding cable news anchors that we are still recovering and rebuilding after the storm, meeting with private developers, technology companies, alternative energy companies about doing business in the Virgin Islands, sharing with civil rights leaders and advocates our quest for full inclusion in America, getting commitment from administration officials on execution of policy, reminding the highest government decision-makers that I've been on the frontline for THEM, so I need their support for MY people.

It's why I can text a news anchor and say, "You said Puerto Rico and forgot to say the Virgin Islands," and they then correct themselves on air. It's why I can plead with White House officials to grant the Virgin Islands the ONLY cost share waiver EVER given to a locale. It's why the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under Law, Right to Democracy and the NAACP stood with us and got the Justice Department (DOJ) THIS year to say they would stop using the racist Insular Cases in any future litigation and sent a memo stating this to all DOJ offices around the country.

It's why Cabinet members agree to get their teams to work WITH us to support our issues. It's why the Democrats' Build Back Better bill contained Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for the Virgin Islands before the entire bill was killed in the Senate. It's why there was serious discussion for Biden's border bill to include the Visa Waiver legislation for the VI, before former-President Trump convinced the GOP to not support it. It's also why we got \$15 billion in recovery funding, rather than \$1 billion.

Some of the best advice I got when I came to Congress was to get a reputation as a work horse - not a show horse or jackass. Show up even when you don't have to and do the work - it will pay off. That advice has proven to be true.

Virgin Islanders produce the best and we deserve the best. Virgin Islanders need to be in the room.