

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett Leads Pushback on Maritime Fees in Letter to Trump; Bryan Sees Trade Opportunity for Virgin Islands

Plaskett says the executive order could devastate island supply chains. Bryan suggests the USVI might avoid tariffs due to its customs zone and expand its \$26B regional transshipment role.

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The Crown Bay Cargo Facility. By. TAFARI NELSON, VIPA ENGINEER.

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett on Friday issued a formal update on the implications of a recent executive order signed by President Donald Trump, warning that the proposed maritime port fees could significantly disrupt commerce in coastal and

island communities—including the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The order advances the administration's Section 301 tariff actions and outlines a framework to impose substantial port fees on maritime operators with fleets that include Chinese-built vessels. Under the directive, these operators could face fees of up to \$1.5 million per vessel entry, with an additional \$1 million fee if 25 percent or more of their fleet is foreign-built—even if the vessels are U.S.-flagged and U.S.-owned?.

Plaskett said the proposal would result in increased shipping costs, delays, and in some cases, termination of service by cargo carriers, particularly in remote and island jurisdictions like the Virgin Islands.

"These actions will cause increased shipping costs, shipping delays and, in some cases, the wholesale termination of service by cargo carriers to impacted locations throughout the coast of the United States and especially places like the Virgin Islands," she warned.

The executive order also instructs the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to evaluate the imposition of fees on Chinese-built cranes and cargo-handling equipment, a measure Plaskett said would impact operations at virtually all U.S. ports.

In response, the congresswoman said she has been actively engaging with the Virgin Islands maritime industry, and has met with ambassadors to Caribbean nations to assess how shipowners, operators, and builders may be affected. She also raised the issue during a House Ways & Means Committee hearing, pressing Ambassador Jameison Greer to reconsider the policy's impact on U.S. outlying areas like the Virgin Islands.

Plaskett announced that she is leading a formal letter to Ambassador Greer and the Trump administration, calling for an exemption for the territory. "Our communities would bear tremendous undue cost, which makes clear the need for an exemption," she stated. She emphasized that the economic burden would not only affect the Virgin Islands but "permeate through the Caribbean region"?

However, amid concerns about the sweeping policy's effects, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. [offered a more optimistic view](#), pointing to the Virgin Islands' unique status as a separate customs zone as a potential buffer from the federal tariffs. Speaking at the Seatrade event in Miami, Governor Bryan explained that U.S. tariffs may not apply to goods in transit to the Virgin Islands.

"We're hoping that we can get clarification on that from the President and the White House to make sure that goods being picked up in Florida and being exported to the U.S. Virgin Islands will not be subject to those tariffs," Governor Bryan said.

He also highlighted the potential upside if the territory remains exempt from the new fees. "That allows us to not only create cheaper prices for our residents, but also... huge transshipment spaces in St. Croix as well as St. Thomas," he explained, noting that approximately \$26 billion in trade flows through the Virgin Islands' ports annually for distribution throughout the Caribbean. "That number," the governor added, "could grow."

While Plaskett continues her push for policy change on Capitol Hill, Bryan's remarks provide a counterbalance, suggesting the territory may be uniquely positioned to leverage its customs independence for economic opportunity.

Still, Plaskett remains cautious. “Even amidst the imposition of these actions that will have radically negative consequences for our corner of the American experience,” she said, “we continue to urge the Trump administration to heed the feedback of elected officials, the maritime industry, and stakeholders.”?

Both leaders affirmed their commitment to defending the economic interests of the Virgin Islands. Plaskett noted she will continue working in a bipartisan manner with colleagues, maritime industry figures, and community stakeholders to advocate for the territory. Governor Bryan, meanwhile, signaled the importance of monitoring the rollout of the policy and engaging federal officials for clarification and support.