

Frett-Gregory Faults Plaskett and Roach Over VIHFA Crisis, Offers Six-Part Reform Plan

The sponsored article argues the territory was blindsided by HUD's action, questions Plaskett's federal relationships and Roach's role in the current administration, and proposes a six-part plan to strengthen oversight, compliance and project delivery.

Sponsored Content / **Published On July 22, 2026 06:56 PM /**

Staff Consortium **July 22, 2026**

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Former Senator and current gubernatorial candidate, Donna Frett-Gregory.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") dealt a devastating blow to the Virgin Islands economy this week by suspending the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority ("HFA") from receiving future federal funds, citing the local administration's inaction, corruption, mismanagement, waste, and deficient disaster recovery efforts. The HFA was awarded

nearly \$2 billion in federal funding and due to mismanagement it will no longer have access to the remaining funds pending investigation. This is not merely a warning, it is a crisis. Virgin Islanders should be deeply concerned that even more damaging consequences may follow if we don't have the right leadership in place.

Virgin Islanders should also be concerned that we were blindsided by this sudden freeze in funding. From my 30 years of experience in government and working with federal partners, I know that a funding freeze of this magnitude should never come as a surprise. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett has repeatedly pointed to her relationships in Washington, D.C. Yet this latest development raises serious questions about whether those relationships meaningfully exist because our representative should have been alerted that this critical funding to the Virgin Islands was in jeopardy. Instead, Delegate Plaskett herself stated, "It would appear that this is not a new issue." This is a wake up call and it begs the question: what relationships in Washington?

Let's be honest with ourselves, regardless of our affiliations. Ms. Plaskett's role as an impeachment manager during President Trump's impeachment trial, along with her frequent media appearances criticizing him, has alienated the President and the very administration that will determine what federal assistance, if any, is allocated to the Virgin Islands. She has burned a critical bridge, and that could have devastating consequences for the people of the Virgin Islands.

In Washington, relationships matter, and the people of the Virgin Islands cannot afford leadership that has jeopardized the strong relationships our Territory has spent decades building, from the days of Ron de Lugo to Donna Christensen.

With respect to Lt. Governor Roach, he has quietly and passively served alongside an administration that has led us to this point and prolonged state of inaction. At a time when we need bold, progressive, and active leadership, he is asking Virgin Islanders to give him four more years to address the very problems the current administration has failed to solve during the past eight.

Mrs. Stacey Plaskett and Mr. Tregenza Roach do not have the experience required to meet this moment. They lack financial management expertise and an understanding of the inner workings of government that is required to dig us out of this crisis. I am uniquely qualified to best serve the Virgin Islands at such a time as this.

Having served in the Executive Branch, I led the response and mitigation efforts for two similar crises at the Department of Justice and the Department of Education, where the loss of federal funding was at stake. My deep experience in finance and government financial management make me the most qualified leader to protect our federal funding and tackle the energy, infrastructure and healthcare crises facing the Virgin Islands.

Now let's talk about solutions. And I can assure you that moving VIHFA to another set of hands or bringing in external parties does not solve the underlying problem. We have strong local subject matter experts. What we need is stronger oversight, greater accountability, and decisive action.

I have reached out to Governor Bryan and sent correspondence to HUD Deputy Secretary Andrew D. Hughes. I understand that the Governor's team is working diligently to mitigate the loss of these federal funds in the next 30 days. It is our hope that within the last 5 months of this administration they will be able to correct this vexing issue. But, we have a Plan Forward.

Rodney and I will move swiftly to strengthen the management, oversight, and accountability of all federally funded programs across the Government of the Virgin Islands. We will immediately implement a Federal Funding Action Plan to protect existing funding, strengthen accountability, and prevent future crises, our plan begins with the following actions:

- Conduct a top-to-bottom comprehensive review of every federally funded program to ensure compliance, accountability and mitigate corruption.
- Develop a comprehensive federal grants management strategy to protect funding, improve compliance, and accelerate project delivery.
- Bring back the Federal Programs Accountability Unit that reports directly to the Governor to oversee grants, monitor performance, and resolve issues quickly.
- Modernize federal grants management with a centralized tracking system and real-time performance dashboards.
- Provide training and professional development for employees responsible for grants management, procurement, financial reporting, and federal compliance to strengthen government capacity.
- Increase transparency and public accountability by providing regular public updates on federally funded projects.

The suspension of the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority by HUD is a serious matter that demands immediate action, not political rhetoric or finger-pointing. The people of the Virgin Islands cannot afford to lose access to the remaining federal disaster recovery funds that are essential to rebuilding our communities and securing a better quality of life for all Virgin Islanders.

This is not the time for passive or self-serving leadership. The Virgin Islands needs leaders with the energy, vision, and commitment to usher in a new way of doing business. Rodney and I are deeply committed to these islands and to the people who call them home. We will build productive relationships on both sides of the aisle, here at home and in Washington, and we will confront the problems that have weakened our economy and diminished our quality of life. Our only agenda is to serve our people and strengthen our home. We are mission-driven, and we believe in accountability, transparency, and governing with a sense of urgency. Rodney and I ask for your support so that, together, we can do the people's business and build a stronger future for every Virgin Islander.

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