

The Virgin Islands Consortium

How Stacey Plaskett Defeated Senator Malone

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Ernice Gilbert **August 10, 2014**



It remains an enigma to many: how exactly did Attorney Stacey Plaskett, someone who'd only ran for office once before in 2012, and was defeated by Delegate Donna Christensen, managed to hand Senate President and much-loved VI Politician Shawn-Michael Malone such a stunning and decisive defeat in the Virgin Islands August 2nd Democratic Primary election.

I was also curious to know how Mrs. Plaskett, who's married, has five children with her husband and also worked while campaigning incessantly, pulled it off. So in an interview with me on the Virgin Islands Political Consortium yesterday, on 102.1 FM, Life Radio, I asked her the question.

Before she answered, Plaskett detailed the last two weeks of the grueling campaign that she had persisted through, revealing a human side of the candidate that would have otherwise rested only in the memories of those closest to her.



"Well it's interesting because everyone's going to have to find their space and their place, what they're going to be doing when the results are coming in. So I was on St. Croix at our headquarters and my husband and a lot of the people were inside, and I actually happened to be sitting on the curb with about two other people outside of the headquarters, and they were trying to keep my spirits up and keep me distracted, and so they were telling jokes and bantering with one another. I saw my husband [Jonathan] bend down and started to write and I thought, oh, I wonder if the numbers are coming in, and I kind of dismissed it. Within 15 minutes [however], people came out and told me that we had won. So it was kind of a surreal feeling because we had been working so hard, and I know the sacrifices that my household made, the sacrifices that our volunteers made, and there were a lot of people who supported us whose jobs were made uncomfortable, and that to me was kind of justification that I felt.

"The Last two weeks before the [primary election], I had been receiving a lot of encouragement from a sister who lives off Island now, and she had a prayer group that had a blog that I could call into, and every evening at six o'clock, this group was getting together and praying and I could call in and listen, and lift myself up, and the last week they just prayed specifically about these elections. That was encouraging to me, to know that there were people out there -- and I have to tell you, the Friday when we realized how much it was going to rain, initially that was just a huge fear for me, particularly when I understood that the rain was going to be strongest on St. Croix, which is where our analysis had told us would be our strongest place.

"So I was concerned as to how the numbers were going to look for us on St. Thomas. If we are not able to pull off St. Croix, how are we going to do this, [and] we were talking to our St. Thomas team through it all."

Plaskett then explained their strategy which included initiating a strong phone-banking system, utilizing the youth while retaining the wisdom of older voters, and a tenacity from Plaskett herself to press on in the midst of difficulties and setbacks, the likes of which we hadn't seen in a long time from Virgin Islands politicians.

"We had very strong phone banking. What we had been doing was first finding out who our core supporters were and on the day of election, calling those individuals again, reminding them about coming out to vote and affording them transportation.



"One of the first things is that we were enormously organized. Prior planning prevents poor performance, and so we were very prepared and very well thought-out. We were also very diligent about our work, and everyone on our team was extremely hard-working.

"I was up four o'clock in the morning, Jonathan's here, he can attest. Up sending out emails, talking with people, 6 a.m. call before the day begins -- and I also worked during that time."

I could not believe that Mrs. Plaskett was able to work a regular job while campaigning, as it seemed she was everywhere all the time, so I pressed for an explanation.

"Well in the morning we would try and go out to corners, when school was in session we would go to a school and try and hand out things to parents who were dropping their students off, then I would go to work from 9 a.m. to 12 or 1 p.m., and I'd make sure I meet with someone for lunch, ask for their support, have a discussion with them, meet with the team, and then do the same thing in the evenings as well -- going back out.

"So we were very organized. I attribute a lot of it to our team being very cohesive with one another, having discussions between St. John, St. Thomas and St. Croix on a weekly basis. [We had] conference calls where we would talk about where our weaknesses were, where do we need support and where do we need help."

The hard work, in part, was because "we didn't have some of the things others already in office had," Plaskett said. "So I didn't have the bully pulpit of the legislature to give speeches that are picked up by the news on a regular basis. I can't send out a press release and immediately it's going to be picked up, so [the work] had to be on the ground.

"We had a lot of house meetings and I'm so thankful to people who opened up their homes, to tell their friends that they were supporting me, and that they wanted their

friends to meet me and hear from me, and I really enjoyed those discussions as well."

She continued: "One of the other things I did was because I believe that we are moving from one chapter to the next, and that it's one generation stepping forward, was to allow younger people to run the show.

"Young people ran the show on St. Thomas and on St. Croix our campaign manager is a very young person, but we teamed up with our elders. So what I would tell the older people who would say that 'I finish with politics, I done with it, I don't want to be bothered anymore' -- I'm like well listen, you don't have to go out, we just want your brain (laughs), we just want to soak up the knowledge and the advise that you have.

"So allowing them to explain to us how it's been done before, and they would say, 'well I remember when [Governor] Farrelly campaigned we did this, and with Hodge this is what happened.

"Give young people an opportunity to really take this on, because it's our Virgin Islands, and I feel like I straddle between both of those age groups. But it's a younger people's Virgin Islands, and I've repeatedly said that until young people takeover the politics and the issues, that it will always remain the same. There has never been a movement for social change that is successful unless young people are involved."

Democratic nominee Stacey Plaskett will face off with Republican candidate Vince Danet in the general election.