

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Scotland: The Perfect Storm

Opinion / **Published On August 11, 2014 07:53 PM /**

Ashley Scotland **August 11, 2014**



VIPC permanent panelist and principal of Open Academy VI, Mr. Ashley Scotland, gives reasons for the astonishing outcome of the August 2nd, 2014 Delegate to Congress Democratic primary between Stacey Plaskett, Shawn-Michael Malone and Emmett Hansen.

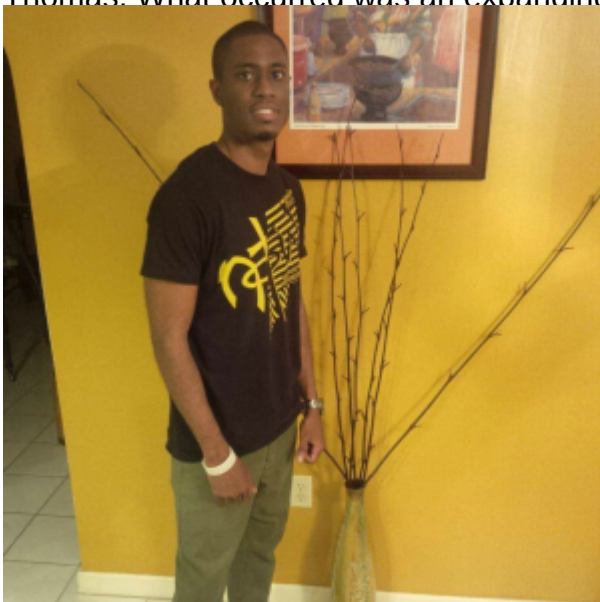
Tropical Storm Bertha hit the U.S.V.I. on August 2, 2014, but the only storm that people were talking about on August 3, 2014 was the one that the Delegate to Congress Democratic Nominee Attorney Stacey Plaskett unleashed on her fellow competitors. It was not so much the fact that Attorney Stacey Plaskett won that surprised many, but by the large margins she was able to attain in her victory. A quick glance at the numbers show that she dominated in her home district – St. Croix, and almost defeated

Senator Shawn-Michael Malone in his own. The question that many are asking now, is how did this happen?

Looking at the Storm

How was she able to do this? First let us take a look at the numbers. Over 4,782 people turned out to vote in the St. Croix District alone, while the St. Thomas District accounted for fewer than 4,000, according to the Elections website. Of the total voter turnout in the 2014 Democratic primary in the Virgin Islands 55 percent of the voters came from the St. Croix District, and 45 percent came from the St. Thomas District. Let us compare this to the 2012 Democratic primary numbers. In 2012 a non-gubernatorial election year - 2,822 voters came out to vote on St. Croix, and 4,322 voters came out to vote on St. Thomas. St. Thomas represented 60 percent of the turnout, while St. Croix represented just 40 percent. In a two-year span there was a complete switch in the turnout ratio on each island. The Malone for Congress Campaign probably did not anticipate the switch in the turnout ratio. Now let us put this into perspective. Traditionally, we know that more voters typically turnout in a gubernatorial election year in both the primaries and in the general election than they do in a non-gubernatorial election year. So using that logic, we should have seen increases in both districts. However, more people showed up to vote in St. Thomas in the 2012 Democratic primary than they did in the 2014 primary. On St. Croix the turnout increased, even with a drop in the number of residents because of the Hovensa refinery shutdown. In the last gubernatorial election primary year 14,042 people participated in the gubernatorial primary process, 6,892 on St. Croix and 7,150 on St. Thomas. The total number of participants this year fell just under 9,000. That is almost a 5,000-voter participation difference, with the bulk of the non-turnout occurring on St. Thomas. What occurred was an expanding of the base for one candidate and a

as what Tropical Storm Plaskett brought



Ashley Scotland

Making of the Storm

These numbers help to paint a narrative of what happened on Aug. 2. First thing that can be concluded is that Plaskett's campaign groundwork was superb. She was able to target and identify her base and get them to the polls - which is key in a primary election. To do this she had to be extremely organized and her messaging had to be on target. In 2012 on St. Thomas, she received 1,935 votes, and in 2014 she received 1,852 votes. Those numbers represent just 83 less votes than she received in 2012. However, in 2012 with that number she was only able to garner 45 percent of the vote with that total number in just a two-candidate race. In 2014 she was able to capture 47 percent of the total St. Thomas vote with 3 candidates running for office. The lack of a major change in her supporter total between the two elections on St. Thomas, eludes to the fact that she is an expert at locating her supporters and getting them out to vote. The second inference that can be concluded from these numbers is that the St. Thomas Democratic voting community was not excited about this primary election. The blame for that lack of excitement falls on the candidates that call St. Thomas home. Primary election politics are all about identifying your base and getting them excited enough to get out to the polls. The low voter turnout in St. Thomas in a gubernatorial year speaks to the lack of excitement for candidates in the race. None of the candidates running from the St. Thomas District was able to capture a divisive victory in their home district. Normal voters just stayed home. The storm of Bertha played a roll, but if excitement levels were higher, the voter turnout would have been much higher.

Another challenge that may have contributed to the turnout was the number of gubernatorial candidates running on St. Croix. Of the six candidates running for the Democratic Party gubernatorial nomination, four were from St. Croix. As a result much of the emphasis in campaigning and targeting were based on St. Croix, as each gubernatorial candidate tried to build and identify their respective bases, mainly on St. Croix. As a result, more people on St. Croix become aware of the issues, and became more alert to the primary process and its importance. This made it easier for Plaskett and her team as they targeted their base on St. Croix, in getting them out to the polls. The third inference that can be concluded is that Plaskett's attempt to create a wedge issue on St. Croix using the University of the Virgin Island's Research and Technology Park's amendment presented by Malone. She was able to protect her home base by collecting 53 percent of the votes cast on St. Croix.

Plaskett helped to play a role in this perfect storm. She did an excellent job in identifying her base in St. Thomas and getting her supporters to the poll. She did a great job in capitalizing on the higher voter turnout in St. Croix by driving home the wedge issue of the Malone Amendment. The issue not only helped her solidify her base, but it helped to add to it from her previous primary run in 2012. She also benefited from the low voter participation in St. Thomas. In a typical primary year with greater participation in St. Thomas, the dynamics of the race probably would have shifted. Malone, in his last primary election, received over 4,000 votes in his home district of St. Thomas, but the last count reflected he had only received 1,923 votes in his home district. While not all votes generally transfer from one office to the next, it is fair to say he is well liked in his home district and the lower voter turnout on St. Thomas worked against him. While the perfect storm blew Plaskett into victory, the perfect storm was a disaster for Malone and his team - as no one could have predicted the outcome.

Quick Facts

- 871 more people turned out to vote in the delegate race in St. Croix.
- 55 percent of the total vote in the delegate race came from St. Croix, while 45 percent of the total vote came from St. Thomas.
- There was a 3,239 vote difference between 2014 and 2010 on St. Thomas. There was a 2,110 vote difference between 2014 and 2010 on St. Croix,
- 1,500 more people voted in the St. Thomas than in St. Croix in the 2012 primary.