

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Stacey Plaskett Sees Risk For Virgin Islands As US-Cuba Relations Normalize

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The historic move by President Barack Obama on Dec. 17 to lift a 50-year embargo on Cuba and normalize U.S. relations with the communist country has been praised as well as decried by many. As a result of the move, Congresswoman-elect Stacey Plaskett sees trouble for the territory's tourism product, and reminded residents that some of the activists who stood up against and were persecuted by Cuban politician and revolutionary, Fidel Castro, who served as prime minister of the nation from 1959 to 1976 and president from 1976 to 2008, live in the territory. She said residents should be sensitive to those families and the distresses they faced during those years.

"While I agree with some action to move past a 50-year-long vestige of the Cold War that did little to free Cuban nationals from dictatorial reign, I think that we should be considerate to the sacrifices of the many activists, political prisoners, and their families who have paid heavy prices for their opposition to the Castro regime, some of whom live here in our territory and are a part of our Virgin Islands family," said Democrat Plaskett, who won a [landslide victory](#) in the Nov. 4 General Election Delegate to Congress contest against Republican Vince Danet.

"That is one of the reasons why we should be methodical in our changes in diplomatic relations with Cuba," she added.

Additionally, the Congresswoman-elect foresees stiff competition for the territory's tourism brand when ships start docking in Cuba--which is just miles away from the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico--and has reached out to Congressman Pedro Pierluisi of Puerto Rico to work together for solutions.

"The United States must not make these changes in a vacuum and need to consider the U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as our sister island of Puerto Rico, and the overall Caribbean Basin in any significant changes in relations," Plaskett continued.

"Should the U.S. decide to move forward, assistance to the Virgin Islands to make us competitive in tourism, economic development including our rum industry, etc., must be part of the equation and the overall discussions," she said.

In 1961, Castro announced the socialist nature of his administration, after overthrowing president Fulgencio Batista in 1959 during the Cuban Revolution, which began in 1953. Cuba became a one-party state under Communist Party rule--the first of its kind in the Western hemisphere.

Pictured above, Cuban resort Iberostar Varadero.