

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett Turns Down Obama's Invite To Landmark Cuba Trip; Cites Previously Scheduled Panel Discussion On St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett said on Wednesday that she has refused an invitation from President Barack Obama to take the historic trip to Cuba with him, opting instead to attend a previously scheduled panel discussion on this islands with members of Congress and business executives in the technology sector on March 19, at the Buccaneer Hotel and Resort.

"I regret not being able to join the president and the first lady in Cuba," Ms. Plaskett said. "There are a number of challenges faced by the local citizens of the Virgin Islands that

have gone unnoticed for decades, and it is my belief that our previously scheduled activities will help make inroads in mitigating those challenges and help elevate the needs of the territory in the Washington discourse."

She continued: "I believe both to be chief among my many responsibilities as the representative for the people of the Virgin Islands. I am, However, honored to have been considered for such an important and historically significant visit and will continue to support the president as he advances his agenda with regard to improving the lives of the Cuban people."

Ms. Plaskett has in the past [repudiated](#) Mr. Obama for his actions to liberate Cuba from stiff restrictions set against the island by the U.S.; insisting that the president should first turn his gaze to the territory, which she contends is in desperate need of federal aid.

"Renewed diplomatic and economic relations with Cuba present real challenges to the territory, specifically, in competition for U.S. tourism dollars and as a potential diversion of port and manufacturing opportunities in the Caribbean," Ms. Plaskett said. "In my discussions with the Obama administration and fellow lawmakers, I have emphasized the need for the United States to prioritize the interests of its own island territories above the interest of diplomatic relations with Cuba."

As for the panel discussion set for March 19, Ms. Plaskett said the panels will explore ways to spur innovation and create jobs by closing the digital divide in minority and economically challenged communities. Additionally, the group will also explore ways to expand the political influence of the Caribbean diaspora in the United States.

"I want to capitalize on the opportunity to give my colleagues in Congress a first-hand look at the needs of the territory. This will help provide a visual connection on how exclusion from Federal provisions and legislation impact our Virgin Islands," Ms. Plaskett said. "It is also an opportunity for the business executives attending to see the massive potential of our expanded broadband capabilities and to connect with local leaders in the technology sector. We are also hopeful that this will lead to future investments in technology education initiatives and the development of a sustainable technology workforce in the territory."

The members of Congress attending the panels made arrangements to participate in the activities in the territory at Congresswoman Plaskett's request prior to President Obama announcing his plans to travel to Cuba, Ms. Plaskett said.

Attendees and participants in panel discussions will begin traveling to the territory on Thursday, March 17 and will remain in St. Croix until Sunday, March 20. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus, along with executives from Google and others will be in attendance.