

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett, Tell Us About The Panel Discussion That You Chose Over Obama's Invite To Cuba

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President Barack Obama's trip to Cuba, the first for a sitting U.S. President in over 90 years, and one that changes Cuba/U.S. relations from alienated to mostly reconciled, has come and gone. The historic trip included Democrat and Republican representatives, U.S. Chamber of Commerce officials, airline and cruise line leaders, major U.S. businesses and more. In fact, a U.S. delegation [estimated to be](#) between 800-1,200 made the trip to Cuba with Mr. Obama, a telling sign of its significance and impact.

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett told the territory's electorate that she refused Mr. Obama's invite [because of a previously scheduled panel discussion](#) with congresspeople and some technology executives. The meeting, [she said](#), was an opportunity to "give my

colleagues in Congress a first-hand look at the needs of the territory." As The Consortium's Editorial Board [has opined](#), Ms. Plaskett's move was a costly miscalculation; and it will negatively impact the Virgin Islands and whatever political capital that remained through the Delegate to Congress office.

Indeed, Senator Neville James, through a press release issued on Friday, said, "While I am diametrically opposed to her decision and her reasons for not accepting President Obama's invitation to join him, ultimately it was her decision and I respect it."

He later added: "For us in the Virgin Islands, we must make the decision on whether to react defensively and in the process hinder prospects of mutualism, or use this opportunity to help us catapult our economy towards prosperity."

We also find it rather concerning that Ms. Plaskett, 7 days following her panel discussion held at the Buccaneer Hotel and Resort in St. Croix, has yet to produce a press release detailing the success of her meeting -- especially since her decision to snub the president has elicited heated debate among the people who voted her into office. One cannot overstate the congresswoman's faux pas here; and the consequences for the territory. So it's of utmost importance for Ms. Plaskett to allay the concerns of her constituents and detail the outcome of her meeting.

Did the congressmen commit to supporting the territory through specific initiatives after learning of its needs? If so, tell us about them and give us a timeline as to when said support will be realized. Did the technology executives, learning about our [topnotch Internet capabilities](#), pledged to invest by either using our bandwidth or setting up shop here? If that's the case, the companies' names and a timeline would be appreciated as well.

Such details would work to quell the frustrations of residents who saw the congresswoman's decision as a sign of political weakness. And though some view the mistake as irreversible, it would at least bolster the arguments of those who think she made the right choice.

Ms. Plaskett has expressed her angst with Mr. Obama's efforts to reopen Cuba while the territory, she says, suffers.

"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 contended in a recently issued press release. "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."

But Ms. Plaskett's concerns, though legitimate, had no chance of stalling a historic trip by a sitting U.S. President; one who has chosen to make the reopening of Cuba a cornerstone of his presidency. The changes are quickly propelling Cuba into a new reality of tourism and commerce, and it would have been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Ms. Plaskett to learn about Cuba's culture and even initiate a relationship with officials there.

Consider This

According to the Los Angeles Times, thirteen U.S. airlines have applied for permission from the Department of Transportation to provide direct flights to Havana, and Connecticut-based Starwood Hotels and Resorts recently announced a contract to manage several hotels owned by the Cuban government. Carnival is already selling tickets for cruises that will dock in Cuban ports later this year, and Google is expected to announce plans to expand Internet access in Cuba.

Making the rounds in Havana during the trip were the chief executives of PayPal, which hopes to launch an online remittance service in Cuba, and Airbnb, which already offers 4,000 rental properties on the island.

Had Ms. Plaskett made the trip to Cuba, she would have had an opportunity to aggressively court these and other influential business leaders, all while sharing her efforts with the territory in real time.

If politics is considered a game, then those who play it successfully wound up the victors. The Cuba play was the biggest mistake of Ms. Plaskett's second inning of her first term in office. She now has to perform some spectacular plays to win her first match.

Written By: The Consortium's Editorial Board.

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