

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Trump Budget Threatens Multiple Programs That USVI Depends On, Plaskett Says

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President Donald Trump's budget, making its way through Congress, includes a lot more negatives for the territory relative to funding than positives, and at a press event on Wednesday dubbed "Pen and Pad with Journalists", Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett outlined the programs that face cuts, and those set to receive increases.

Only two programs would see increases if the budget were to pass as is. They include the Office of Insular Affairs (a 10 percent increase for capital improvement project grants), and Homeland & FEMA (the Coast Guard would benefit from the request of \$8.75 billion, up from \$8.63 billion in fiscal year 2017).

Thirteen program face cuts in Mr. Trump's 2018 budget, all of which would affect the territory if implemented. Among them is the Office of Insular Affairs, with the technical assistance grants and empowering Insular communities grants being reduced by \$804,000 and \$154,000 respectively. National Park Service would see a cut of \$400 million, which is estimated to affect 1,242 full-time employees at the National Park System. The operations in the USVI would be reduced as part of the cuts.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is also among the programs facing the deepest cuts, with Mr. Trump's budget calling for \$190 billion in cuts over ten years. This would impact about 44 million Americans, including Virgin Islanders, among them women, infants and children who depend on the WIC program.

Other programs expected to see cuts include the Labor Department (\$2.4 billion); Education Department (\$9 billion); Rural Programs (\$912 million); Agriculture Research (\$382 million); Energy and Environment (70 percent cut to the Dept. of Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy); Transport and Housing (\$500 million); Commerce and Development (subdivisions of the department would be eliminated. These divisions support business and entrepreneurship such as the Economic Development Administration); Homeland & FEMA (the budget calls for phasing out enhanced federal matching funds for the territory's expanded Medicaid population by 2020); and the Treasury Department (The territory's rum cover-over rate increase from \$10.50 to \$13.25 expired at the end of last year, and Ms. Plaskett says the territory's Office of Management and Budget estimate keeps the rate at \$10.50, which suggests that OMB won't request a return to the higher rate).

At the event, held at her office in Frederiksted, Ms. Plasket said the budget would mostly likely see multiple changes, with middle ground being sought on most -- if not all the proposed cuts. "These are some things that we're really going to have to watch. There's going to have to be a lot of negotiations, hopefully a lot of push back," she said.

Watch the video below.

[View the original embedded media](#)