

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett Tells Congress Attempt To Ban Cockfighting In USVI Is 'Downright Wrong,' 'Colonialistic'

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The Congress bill H.R. 2 – Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018, includes an amendment that seeks to ban cockfighting in U.S. territories -- including the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett has come out swinging in opposition to the measure.

Cockfighting is now illegal in all 50 states.

The expressed intent of the amendment is to extend the total ban against animal fighting set forth in the Animal Welfare Act to the U.S. territories. The amendment also prohibits the purchase, sale, or transportation of accessories to be used in cockfights, and

imposes penalties of imprisonment.

Ms. Plaskett, in a statement issued Thursday, forcefully aligned herself against the amendment, calling the measure "downright wrong."

"Cockfighting, like horse racing, is a long-standing recreational activity in the U.S. Virgin Islands with historical and cultural significance to many Virgin Islanders. I do not support banning cockfighting in the U.S. Virgin Islands," she said. "I understand the concerns of those opposed to cockfighting and believe regulatory processes and educational outreach provide the best means of addressing those concerns. Outlawing cockfighting in the Virgin Islands will only create an underground industry, which can prove problematic for local stakeholders and local law enforcement."

The congresswoman added, "To pass an amendment that solely affects the territories, that none of the delegates from the territories support, is pejorative, paternalistic, yes colonialistic and downright wrong."

Puerto Rico is also opposed to the amendment. "The enactment of HR 4202 shall threaten a century-old practice that is deeply rooted in our culture, history, and traditions. Moreover, said bill shall affect various components of our economy that provide services related to this sport, such as veterinarians, game fowl breeders, agricultural stores, and trophies and awards manufacturers, among others," the island commonwealth wrote in a lengthy missive written to Congress urging that the amendment be voted down.

A cockfight is a blood sport between two cocks, or gamecocks, held in a ring called a cockpit. It has long been legal in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The history of raising fowl for fighting goes back 6,000 years. The first documented use of the word gamecock, denoting use of the cock as to a "game", a sport, pastime or entertainment, was recorded in 1634, after the term "cock of the game" used by George Wilson, in the earliest known book on the sport of cockfighting in *The Commendation of Cocks and Cock Fighting* in 1607. But it was during Magellan's voyage of discovery of the Philippines in 1521 when modern cockfighting was first witnessed and documented by Antonio Pigafetta, Magellan's chronicler, in the kingdom of Taytay.

The combatants, referred to as gamecocks, are specially bred and conditioned for increased stamina and strength. Male and female chickens of such a breed are referred to as game fowl.

Cocks possess congenital aggression toward all males of the same species. Wagers are often made on the outcome of the match.

Cockfighting is deemed a blood sport due in part to the physical trauma the cocks inflict on each other, which is sometimes increased by attaching metal spurs to the cocks' natural spurs. While not all fights are to the death, the cocks may endure significant physical trauma.

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