

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Cockfighting Ban In USVI And PR Has Gained Traction In Congress, Even As Bill With Ban Amendment Fails

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The \$867 billion farm bill dubbed H.R. 2 that includes an amendment to ban cockfighting in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, sank 198-213 in Congress after failing to gather enough votes. The embarrassing lapse for the Republican leadership (all Democrats voted against the measure) came after members of the hard-line wing of the party, dubbed the House Freedom Caucus, revolted. The caucus rebelled after House Speaker Paul D. Ryan refused to schedule an immediate vote on a restrictive immigration bill sponsored by the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee.

The bill, which would have imposed strict new work requirements on food aid recipients while maintaining farm subsidies important to rural lawmakers, has an uncertain future.

Republican leaders are already thinking of ways to bring it back up, but its survival could hinge on whether the House leadership clears the way for a vote on the controversial immigration measure.

If the farm bill does manage to come up again and passes, cockfighting in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and all other U.S. territories, will be banned -- as is currently the case in all 50 states. Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, in a release issued Friday, expressed frustration that the amendment to ban cockfighting that she came out swinging against was kept on the bill.

"I am also upset that an amendment to ban cockfighting in Virgin Islands was accepted. That amendment was deeply unfair to territories of the United States and contrary to the original intent of the Animal Welfare Act Amendments of 1976," Ms. Plaskett said. She acknowledged the concerns those opposed to cockfighting have, but added that the local government "is the proper place to impose bans or regulatory processes to addressing those concerns. Introducing measures that are limited to the territories without any territorial delegation support is an overreach at best. The energy of those members who also do not support legislation to bring support to the children and people of the Virgin Islands is galling."

The delegate, as with other Democrats, opposed the farm bill and said Republicans who voted against it on Friday did "the right thing."

"As Virgin Islands farmers struggle to qualify for limited grants and technical support, and large scale famers cope with the damage of the Trump tariffs the farm bill drafted solely by Republicans did nothing to support those farmers nor the millions of Americans that rely on food nutrition programs," Ms. Plaskett said. "Instead of coming together in a bipartisan fashion to strengthen hungry families and tackles the unique challenges facing family farms in the Virgin Islands, the Republicans wrote a bill that stole food from the hungry. This 'Harm Bill' would have reduced \$23 billion in SNAP benefits that children, seniors, students, 1.5 million veterans, 23,000 service members, individuals with disabilities and working families who rely on the programs to keep from going hungry. Republicans were attempting to put back in the budget money taken out in the previous tax cuts to wealthy Americans."

Ms. Plaskett added: "The SNAP reductions in this 'Harm Bill' would have had an even more detrimental impact on Americans in offshore jurisdictions, such as my district, the Virgin Islands. Although there are published reports by the Government Accountability Office indicating that the cost of food in offshore jurisdictions far exceed that of the mainland, the Republicans have chosen to ignore this glaring data in this rushed 'Harm Bill'.

"The 'Harm Bill' also leaves rural communities like the Virgin Islands behind by slashing hundreds of millions of dollars from job-creating rural development initiatives and loan guarantees for small businesses, while charging new fees for rural development loans; adding new bureaucracy and complexity to high-speed broadband grants that farm communities have already waited on for too long.

"I will continue to stand strong against this bad bill, and stand ready to work to return to the table and craft a balanced, robust farm bill that honors our responsibilities to the 16 million men and women of agriculture and the nearly 41 million Americans who are food-

insecure.”

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