

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Congress Moves To Ban Cockfighting In USVI, PR

VIC News / **Published On December 13, 2018 09:00 AM /**

Staff **December 13, 2018**



The U.S. Congress on Wednesday approved legislation that would ban cockfighting in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, following a monthslong battle by the territories' representatives in Washington, including Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, to kill the measure.

“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,” Ms. Plaskett [said in a statement issued in May](#). “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.”

The delegate 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.”

Even Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rossello traveled to Washington to lend his support in an effort to stop the legislation from moving forward. However, according to The New York Times, it was too late; legislators unexpectedly moved up the vote and approved the bill, which already passed the Senate.

Cockfighting, which has a thriving industry in Puerto Rico, is said to employ 27,000 people and generates \$18 million annually. “We’re all going crazy. Everybody is desperate,” said 86-year-old Angel Ortiz, who owns a cockfighting ring in the city of Bayamon, according to The Times. “There are so many people who make a living off of this.”