

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Letter To Trump, Plaskett Registers 'Strong Opposition' To Diverting Disaster Funding For Border Wall Construction

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett last week wrote a [letter](#) to President Donald Trump that gave voice to her adamant opposition to reports that the administration was considering diverting funding set aside for disaster relief for the states and U.S. territories to fund the construction of a wall along the U.S./Mexico border. The consideration came as neither Mr. Trump and Republican lawmakers, nor the Democrats, have been able to reach a compromise that would reopen the partially shuttered federal government and

fund the \$5.7 billion border project.

The shutdown is now a month in, with January 21st being the 31st day since it began. Still, there has been no compromise between the two parties, and Democrats have been resistant to the president's latest proposal, which offers to restore temporary protections to some undocumented immigrants, called Dreamers -- individuals who were brought to the U.S. by their parents without documentation -- in exchange for the border wall.

"On behalf of my constituents, I write in strong opposition to any attempt to divert disaster funding for border wall construction," the delegate to Congress opened, adding, "Diverting these funds will be to the detriment of the communities that are still reeling from the devastation of multiple natural disasters."

Ms. Plakett sought to remind the president of the 2017 storms, Hurricanes Irma and Maria, that ravaged the U.S. Virgin Islands in September and October, respectively. She also mentioned the estimated damage of \$10.8 billion to the U.S. territory, and said continued funding from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), remains critical to the USVI's disaster recovery work, including power restoration, repairs, studies and projects, among other important efforts. "Virgin Islanders are still without roofs and the process to rebuild our public schools and hospitals have yet to begin," Ms. Plaskett wrote. "Diverting disaster funds from these communities would create security risks and make them even more vulnerable."

She highlighted federal employees in the territory who are among the hundreds of thousands around the country being affected by the shutdown. The delegate also spoke of the thousands of Virgin Islanders dependent on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), widely called food stamps, who will be affected if the protracted shutdown continues. According to data provided by the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands in its [2014 USVI Kids Count Data Report](#), 31 percent of the territory's children lived in poverty, while another 67 percent were on food stamps.

"The Democratic-led House has passed numerous bills in the last weeks to reopen the government and begin meaningful discussions on border security," Ms. Plaskett wrote. "The U.S. territories are extended borders for the mainland. Without adequate funding, our border security in the Caribbean will be compromised. I strongly urge that you reject any proposal presented to divert disaster funding for border wall construction."