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Plaskett Increases Influence in Congress, Becomes Most Followed Congressional Delegate From a U.S. Territory

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett speaks during a news conference with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi regarding the vote by mail provision in the Heroes Act at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC, on Thursday, May 21, 2020. By. STEFANI REYNOLDS/CNP /MEDIAPUNCH

Day two of President Donald Trump's impeachment trial was historic for several reasons. Not only was it the first time a president was put on trial for a second time by the U.S. Senate, it was also the first time a congressional delegate from a U.S. territory presented in an impeachment case.

The trial ended with a dramatic vote for witnesses as House impeachment managers forced a Senate vote on day five. But after the Senate voted to allow witness testimony, the day ultimately ended without calling any witnesses and with Mr. Trump's acquittal.

Interestingly, national coverage of Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett — the delegate representing the at-large-congressional district in the U.S. Virgin Islands — focused on the Americans living in U.S. territories and the right to vote in fair elections.

The House managers said the former president's speech, delivered before a violent insurrection, was not an isolated event and was part of a broader campaign to delegitimize state election results that didn't favor him. It was also an attempt to frustrate the American people and incite a rebellion in the nation's capital, the House impeachment managers charged.

In his defense, Trump attorneys argued that the former president did not incite an insurrection, and language found in his speech delivered during the fateful Jan. 6 rally, and the word "fight" that Democrats honed in on, was protected speech. They also argued that Democrats have used the word "fight" and similar verbiage not to incite violence, but rather to encourage one's supporters.

Asked about why impeachment managers backtracked on a chance to call witnesses, Ms. Plaskett said, "We didn't need more witnesses, we needed more senators with spines." The national media had an epiphanic moment after learning that Ms. Plaskett could not vote to impeach Mr. Trump with the House of Representatives in 2019 and, most recently, January 13, 2021.

The first time the country watched Ms. Plaskett cross-examine someone was in 2019 when she questioned Michael Cohen, Mr. Trump's former personal lawyer. Mr. Cohen testified before Congress about hush money payments made to pornstar Stormy Daniels by then-candidate Trump. He also testified about the former president's alleged connections to Russia and accused Trump's associates and businesses of illegal activities.

Ms. Plaskett, a fourth-term House representative, said she was approached by several of her Republican colleagues in February — persons she has chosen not to identify publicly — who she said told her in private that she made a case for convicting the former president. These Republicans, Ms. Plaskett added, said they would vote to acquit Mr. Trump nonetheless. [Seven Republican senators](#) voted to convict the former president as his trial ended on February 13, a historic bipartisan representation in U.S. impeachment trials.

Ms. Plaskett joined Twitter in August 2014 and held a modest following of over 5,000 for some time. After she interrogated Cohen on national television in 2019, her Twitter account received over 50,000 new followers in a few short days. After her delivery as an impeachment manager earlier this month, the delegate to Congress has enjoyed over 253,000 followers. For perspective, Ms. Plaskett now boasts more Twitter supporters than Jeniffer González, the resident commissioner of Puerto Rico and the territory's sole congressional delegate who represents over 3 million Americans.

Ms. González boasts more followers than Plaskett on Facebook, but the combined total of all of their official social media pages places the Virgin Islands representative at nearly 300,000 online supporters. If history is any indication, it's likely that if Twitter and other social media platforms did not block Mr. Trump after inciting an insurrection on Capitol Hill in January, he would have attacked each impeachment manager on Twitter. That reality never materialized during his second impeachment trial.=

Ms. Plaskett also used her time as an impeachment manager to highlight that nearly 4 million Americans live in U.S. territories and can't participate in presidential elections, despite being a part of the United States for over a century. The U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Puerto Rico all have similar agendas that include federal voting rights, cultural and ancestral recognition, economic equity, and access to adequate and affordable healthcare.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has played a defining hand in Ms. Plaskett's rise as a political powerhouse. Both Democrats led a congressional delegation that visited the Virgin Islands in 2018. Ms. Plaskett and congressional representatives elected by U.S. territories successfully lobbied Congress to change how disaster aid impacts territories. Under the new policy, Congress and the Federal Emergency Management Agency agreed to rebuild critical infrastructure in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico "as it should be," instead of merely reanimating outdated infrastructure. The new deal opted for modern advancements in tech and resilient infrastructure to withstand extreme weather conditions. Since 2017, all five territories have been affected by major tropical cyclones, and at least four of those cyclones clocked in at category four or category five storms.

Since then, representatives from each territory have grappled with limited access to national media platforms and collaborated on measures to consolidate their power, a move that further bolstered their constituents' agenda and local needs. However, these events and nonstop coverage surrounding voting disparities do not signal an immediate shift in congressional policies that could benefit residents in the Virgin Islands or its sister territories. More pointedly, it illustrates a new reality; that non-voting representatives in the U.S. territories have an ally with growing oversight powers on Capitol Hill.

Ms. Plaskett has worked as an attorney in D.C., New York, and the Virgin Islands, then later working in the Bush administration's Justice Department. Each time her prosecutorial skills grip the national spotlight, Americans learn a bit more about each territory's plight for cultural representation, voting rights, and economic equity.