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Plaskett Calls For Ferry Service Between St. Croix and St. Thomas Funded Through \$220 Million Allocation From Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, who has been using her influence in Washington to ascertain that the U.S. Virgin Islands receives its fair share of Covid-related funding, as well as funding from a myriad of other programs, has some priorities that she would like to see accomplished with federal dollars in the territory.

Speaking Monday night following Governor Albert Bryan's fourth and last State of the Territory Address before he seeks reelection, Ms. Plaskett spoke about some of those priorities, among them a subsidized ferry service between St. Croix and St. Thomas that she said would encourage commerce between the islands.

The ferry service would be funded through [the \\$220 million allocated to the territory](#) as part of the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, signed into law by President Joe Biden on Nov. 15, 2021.

"One of the things I've continuously talked about is that we have sufficient funding now that we should be able to build a federal ferry system between St. Croix and St. Thomas, one that would allow cargo and goods, agricultural good as well as our students to be able to compete with one another between the two islands [at] a very reasonable cost," she said in response to a Consortium question Monday night.

The congresswoman envisions three ferries costing \$6 million or more each, "because of the waters between our islands." She said the three ferries "would really be cost-efficient overtime to allow goods and cargo as well as people between the two islands. That's a huge priority for me."

Asked whether she has held conversations with the Bryan administration regarding the ferry system, Ms. Plaskett said she has written to the governor making known what she is interested in. "I've asked him to share with me what he is going to be working on; I have a preliminary spread sheet from his office, I'd like to drill down on that and make sure that some of those things are realistic, that they are appropriate, that they're not redundant from other places we can receive funding," she said.

The congresswoman also spoke about federal funding for the Dept. of Education and the educational health of the territory's students who have endured back-to-back disasters. She said "seeing that monies that have been given to our educational system are really used appropriately" is a priority of her office.

"I'm very concerned about our young people. I'm a mother, and I am really very concerned about our children and what they have been through in the years since the storms. I know that on one end they're going to have some level of resilience and some creativity that we can't even imagine what's going to come out of this. But there will also be gaps in their learning that we need to supplement through summer and after-school programs and other mechanisms that we can to support them," she said.

Ms. Plaskett mentioned the 34th Legislature and [its attempt](#) to introduce legislation calling for collaboration on the use of the \$547 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding made available to the territory. The "Legislature showed their own frustration in trying to be part of the process and wanting to potentially bring legislation that would allow them to be engaged in the planning for this," she said.

"I've said, can you imagine my frustration in our office, really sweating and working and tireless nights to get the money, and then not to be involved in that process," Ms. Plaskett said. She said the Bryan administration has been forthcoming. "I have to say that I'm grateful that the governor has approached and [asked] what are some of your priorities, what are the things that you're interested in. As you are aware, during the pandemic Congress gave jurisdictions monies for what they believe were lost revenues. The Virgin Islands received \$542 million with several years to spend, and there's broad interpretation of what that money can be used for.

"I want to see that the governor is using the broadband funding that is there in this legislation to ensure that children can be at home, that they can receive the type of education that they need, that small business entrepreneurs, young people can start businesses in the territory, and we can do this in a safe, socially-distanced manner," the delegate to Congress stated.

Ms. Plaskett said that while there's ample funding for the territory from various federal programs, capacity is needed in order to successfully execute funding obligations. "I think that there's a lot of money out there. There's a lot of resources available to the people of the territory. I think we've got to build the capacity to make sure that we utilize this funding appropriately, that the jobs stay in the territory whether they're construction, financial management, entrepreneurship — we've got to put the resources into that."

She added, "This should have been done even before Governor Bryan came into office. We knew early after the storms in 2018 that there was going to be billions of dollars coming, and we should have begun at that point in the previous administration to begin doing the work to ensure that we had the workforce necessary to meet this challenge."

"And so Governor Bryan now is going to have to work on this in his administration. I'm hopeful because I know that labor and workforce is something that this governor is really keen on [and] talks about quite a bit, having been the commissioner of labor in a prior administration. And so I'm really hopeful that that's going to be something that he puts as top priority."

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