

Image not found or type unknown

Frett-Gregory Says It's 'Inappropriate' for Delegate to Congress to Speak After Senate President at Events; Plaskett Responds

Politics / **Published On February 01, 2023 05:57 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **February 01, 2023**

Image not found or type unknown



From left to right: Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett and Senator Donna Frett-Gregory.

A letter written by former Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory and addressed to Governor Albert Bryan that appears to diminish the Delegate to Congress's speaking role at local events has elicited a swift response from the Office of Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, with the congresswoman deeming the letter's suggestions "disrespectful" and "illogical", and one that gives the appearance of misplaced priorities.

Written on Jan. 19, Ms. Frett-Gregory says speaking before the Delegate to Congress at events occurred all throughout her tenure and it's an experience that "I wish for no other senate president to experience during their tenure."

"During my term as President of the 34th Legislature, I attended many official government functions wherein I represented the Legislature of the Virgin Islands. The official programs for most of the events designated our Delegate to Congress to speak after the Senate President which is inappropriate," Ms. Frett-Gregory wrote. She contends that the Revised Organic Act of 1954 "allowed the territory the ability to self-govern and created three separate but co-equal branches of government which does not include the Delegate to Congress," a quote Ms. Plaskett's office interpreted as suggesting that the territory's representative in Congress should not speak at all at local events.

Regarding the Office of the Delegate to Congress, Ms. Frett-Gregory points to its formation in 1972 with H.R. 8787 (Public Law 92-271). The senator then quotes language in the law regarding the Office of Delegate to Congress on election ballots. "The legislature of each territory may determine the order of names on the ballot for election of Delegate, the method by which a special election to fill a vacancy in the office of Delegate shall be conducted, the method by which ties between candidates for the office of Delegate shall be resolved, and all other matters of local application pertaining to the election and the office of Delegate not otherwise expressly provided for herein."

The senator mentions a subsequent law enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands, Act No. 3261, which amended Title 18 of V.I. Code to adopt the local provisions for the federal act, and thereby giving the Legislature the authority to determine the order in which the Office of the Delegate to Congress should be placed on local election ballots.

On this premise, Ms. Frett-Gregory said point blank that the Delegate to Congress — elected by Virgin Islanders — "is not a head of a branch of government and it is not proper protocol for the Delegate to Congress to speak after any leader of the three branches of our local government, and should not be listed as such in any official government program."

The senator wants this message to be shared to "all department, agencies, and instrumentalities" because it is "important as leaders that we practice proper protocol for the office that each of us represent and ensure we are the examples of those that come after us, as they are watching."

Her letter is [here](#).

In a response addressed to Bryan administration Chief of Staff Karl Knight on Jan. 23, Angeline Muckle-Jabbar, chief of staff for Congresswoman Plaskett, noted that their office had received the letter though Ms. Plaskett was not copied. Ms. Muckle-Jabbar said while the order in which the congresswoman has been placed to speak during local events has been inconsistent, it was not a matter of immediate concern to Ms. Plaskett in light of the pressing issues the U.S. Virgin Islands continues to face. However, since the letter was widely disseminated, they thought it prudent to respond.

The delegate's office contends that Ms. Frett-Gregory's letter is based on an "illogical premise." It further states, "The reference to the Organic Act then illogically concludes that the creation of those branches somehow excludes the Delegate to Congress position from any order of importance in local events."

Regarding Ms. Frett-Gregory's citing of the creation of local law, Act No. 3261, Ms. Plaskett's office noted that the order of balloting in the U.S. Virgin Islands Elections System puts the position of Delegate to Congress first.

"Most troubling, the letter seems to suggest that the Delegate does not have a speaking role, nor should she be listed during local events," wrote the delegate's office. "I am sure our shared constituency would find that suggestion disconcerting and troubling."

The letter adds, "As the highest and only federally elected official of the Virgin Islands, the Delegate should be afforded the opportunity to speak at events to which they are invited to present remarks. It is disrespectful to that office and to the people of the Virgin Islands to suggest otherwise. All elected officials of the Virgin Islands deserve a voice."

Ms. Plaskett agrees that the matter of protocol order should be addressed, and suggested that it should be based on sound historical and legal research, as well as pertinent references. The delegate's office pointed to the U.S. Office of Chief Protocol at the State Department, which has a detailed U.S. Order of Precedence as seen [here](#). Following that order, the U.S. president is first, followed by the vice president, the governor of a state (when in own state), then the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chief Justice of the United States, and continuing down the line.

Ms. Plaskett's response is [here](#).

The document also gives helpful suggestions. "A few basic principles regarding precedence should be noted. First, the host or hostess of a meeting or event always takes the primary position of precedence, regardless of their title or traditional ranking. Second, a person's relative precedence may increase or decrease depending on the policy or context behind the specific meeting or event, or based on the wishes of the host on any occasion," it reads.