Plaskett Announces Over Half a Billion Dollars for USVI in $1.9 Trillion Covid Aid Bill

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USVI Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett.

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, with her newly found stardom in Washington and among power players in the Democratic Party, has been using her political capital to secure overwhelming help for the U.S. Virgin Islands, the biggest so far is a massive $584 million allocation to the territory in relief money tied to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“I am proud to note the inclusion of special provisions in this bill for the Virgin Islands that I have been fighting for since I came to Congress," said Ms. Plaskett in a release issued during the wee hours of Saturday morning. "This plan creates equality in the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit for the Virgin Islands, including an advancement of the Child Tax Credit in 2021. This legislation provides federal reimbursement to the Virgin Islands for the cost of these federal tax benefits, and for educating preparers to encourage more workers to elect the tax credits. This will be very important to raise wages, reduce poverty, and improve the economic standing of low-income Americans in the Virgin Islands as we fight the Covid-19 pandemic."

On the big allocation, Ms. Plaskett stated, “This bill also includes a direct federal fiscal transfer of $584 million to the government of the Virgin Islands to respond to the public health emergency and address the negative economic impacts of this pandemic."

Ever since her exceptional performance as an impeachment manager in the trial against former President Donald Trump, Ms. Plaskett has catapulted in popularity and, more importantly, influence in Washington.

The House bill, which is being sent to the Senate where it will be further amended and therefore head back to the House before reaching President Joe Biden's desk, would, among other priorities, send a $1,400 check to millions of Americans, provide $350 billion to state and local governments, enhance and extend federal unemployment benefits, and fund vaccine distribution.

Republicans have unified against the bill, contending it takes care of Democrats' political allies, and is wasteful — especially the parts of the measure for local and state governments and schools — even as the U.S. economy points to a strong recovery without such big spending.

Nonetheless, the bulk of the Democrats' priorities will be approved in the Covid aid bill without Republican support through the reconciliation process, a loophole that allows the majority caucus in the Senate to move forward with their agenda without meeting the 60-vote threshold before legislation can be brought to the Senate floor.

The Democratic priority that appears to be in jeopardy is the effort to raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour. The Senate's non-partisan parliamentarian said Thursday that raising the minimum wage would not comply with the Senate's rules for legislation passed through reconciliation. The parliamentarian is a neutral arbiter of the Senate's rules.

Democrats, however, have vowed to keep fighting for the $15 per hour wage increase, though the party's leadership, namely Mr. Biden and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, have resisted progressives' call to abandon Senate rules and include the provision in the Covid-19 aid bill nonetheless. The bill is bound to become law as Democrats control all branches of government in Washington.

Meanwhile, some Democrats have expressed plans to propose measures to be included in the Covid aid bill that would penalize large corporations who pay employees below $15 an hour. On Friday, Senate Finance Committee Chairman, Ron Wyden (D., Ore.) said he was preparing a plan that would impose a 5 percent penalty on the total payroll of a large corporation if the corporation pays workers below a certain amount. The penalty would increase over the years in Mr. Wyden's yet-to-be-announced plan. In addition, the proposal would provide small businesses with an income tax credit that is equal to 25 percent of wages, if these businesses pay their employees higher wages. The tax credit would be capped at $10,000 per employer per year.

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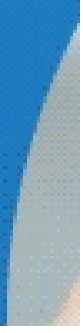

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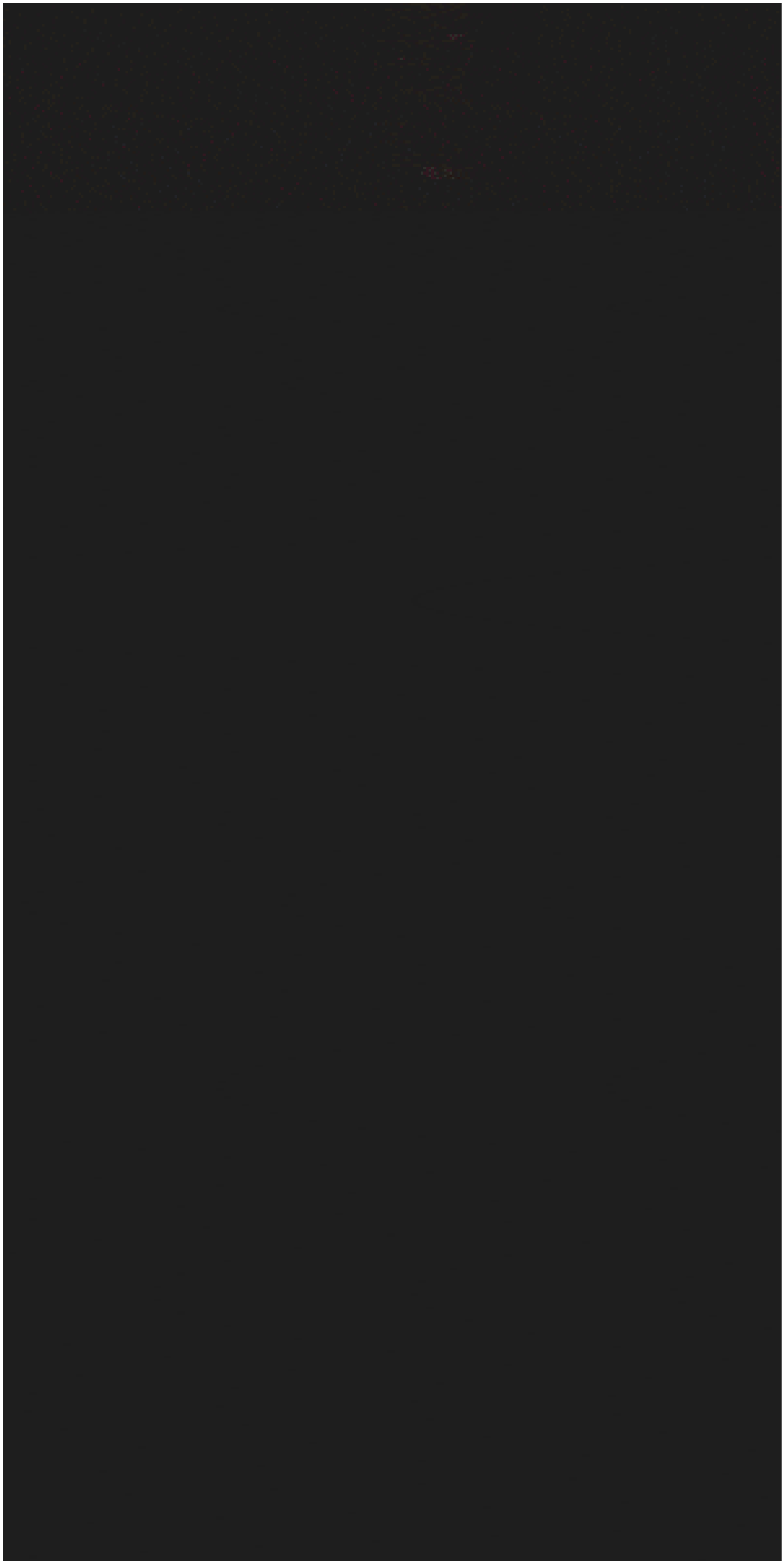

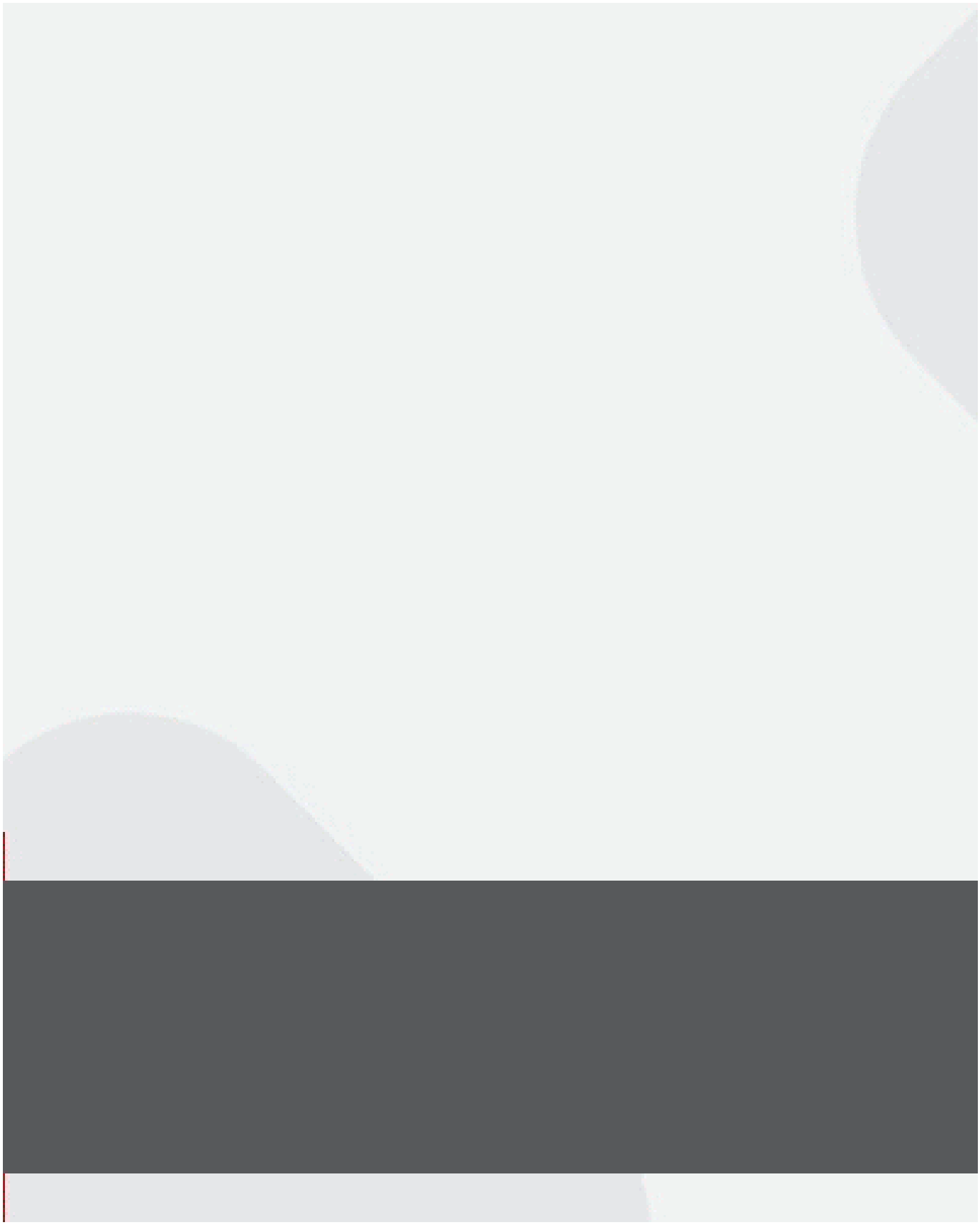

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