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PRESS RELEASES

PLASKETT HOSTS LAND EXCHANGE BRIEFING WITH THE LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS AND HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS RANKING MEMBER

Washington, D.C., August 9, 2023

Tags: [Education](#) , [Energy and Environment](#) , [Infrastructure](#)

For Immediate Release

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August 9, 2023

340-201-6453

PRESS RELEASE



FEDERAL LANDS RANKING MEMBER

Washington, D.C. – This week, Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett hosted a briefing regarding the proposed land exchange between the Government of the Virgin Islands and the National Park Service (NPS) for the construction of a kindergarten through 12th grade school on St. John. Members of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands’ Subcommittee on the Land Exchange heard from and engaged with Member of Congress and professional staff members of the relevant House and Senate Committees. Participants on the call included Congressman Joe Neguse (CO-2), Ranking Member of the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands; Brian Modeste, Minority Staff Director of the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs; and Pat Bond, Senior Advisor on Energy, Environment, and Transportation for Senator Angus King of Maine, Chair of the Senate Energy and Resources Subcommittee on National Parks.

Congresswoman Plaskett shared, “The virtual briefing gave an opportunity to provide an overview of the history and feasibility of congressional actions related to NPS land for the establishment of a Kindergarten through 12th grade school on St. John. In my role as the Member of Congress for the Virgin Islands of the United States, I have advocated for the voices of our constituents to ensure the stakeholders of the proposed land exchange, the Government of the Virgin Islands and the NPS, are aware of Virgin Islanders’ opinions. My office has hosted community meetings and town halls related to this matter, and I have kept constituents informed of federal actions via [press releases](#), radio announcements, and social media engagement.

“Last month, I sent correspondence outlining previous congressional actions related to this matter to Senate President Novelle Francis and clarified legislation related to the Acadia National Park. Senate President Francis and his team have moved expeditiously to support a dialogue with relevant congressional partners to be briefed on actions taken and available. I continue to acknowledge that our local government faces the difficult task of determining how to move forward with the proposed St. John Land Exchange. I also want to reinforce my office’s commitment and advocacy on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands. Additionally, I continue to emphasize the importance of ensuring that we do not put out half-truths or inaccuracies regarding the history and future feasibility of NPS actions.

“There are a few takeaways from the briefing that I would like to emphasize:

1. The professional staff on the call have been intimately engaged for over 30 years at the legislative level with the issue of utilizing National Park Service land on St John for the building of a high school on the island and the various proposals.
1. Congressional staff emphasized that when an action is taken by the National Park Service, it sets the precedent and opens the door for similar action in other National Parks. The National Park Service and previous Presidential Administrations have opposed giving or leasing land not solely to the Government of the Virgin Islands for



onal Park Service has a “no net reduction policy” and has opposed measures that reduce National Park lands in the Virgin Islands National Park, as well as other National Parks throughout the country.

1. The House Natural Resources Committee shared that the previous legislation for a lease of land on the St. John National Park passed by the US House of Representatives in the 110th Congress (H.R. 53) was opposed by the National Park Service and received an unfavorable Statement of Administration Policy. Such statement from the President’s Administration signaled that if passed in the Senate it would not be signed into law, therefore H.R. 53 was not taken up in the Senate as the Administration was opposed to the legislation. That opposition has continued and the Biden Administration and National Park Service have not changed their position, which means the bill would not likely be taken up by the Senate and therefore is not an option of actually being made law.
1. When discussing the recent actions surrounding Acadia National Park in Maine, it was explained that that action taken last year to seemingly give land out of the NPS to the state government of Maine was in actuality, an exchange, as parcels have been, since 1986, disposed from the Acadia National Park and added to the Park in a manner that the National Park Service determined would serve their purpose. The parcel disposed of and used for National Park workforce last year was the last parcel in the addition and removal of multiple parcels over an almost 40 year process. **Maine’s Members of Congress did not convince the National Park Service to create an exception for giving land to the people of Maine in their state.**
1. This Congress, I introduced H.R. 3025 to prohibit the net increase of federally owned land in the Virgin Islands National Park Service on St. John. This legislation addresses the consistent concerns of Virgin Islanders about the ever-expanding presence of the Park on St. John and has been moving through the legislative process expeditiously. Within two months of introduction, the Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing on this legislation. Presently, my staff, the House Natural Resources Committee Majority and Minority, and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee are working to determine language that can be agreed upon by all sides, including the National Park Service. I have tenaciously worked with Committee leadership to advance this legislation.

Congressman Joe Neguse shared, “I am grateful for Congresswoman Plaskett’s continued efforts and advocacy on behalf of the Virgin Islands. She is a tireless champion for her constituents, and I am proud to serve alongside her in the House of Representatives. I appreciate her convening this important meeting.”

Congresswoman Plaskett also shared, “I would like to thank my colleague, Congressman Neguse, for his continued support for the people of our territory, as well as Mr. Modeste, Mr.



Novelle Francis and the members of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands who were present for the briefing. I look forward to continuing our work on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands.”

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