

REP. STACEY PLASKETT SPEAKS AT ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

Democratic Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett was the keynote speaker at the annual (virtual) Fresno County Democratic Party fundraising event, held online on May 11. Plaskett, the at-large (non-voting) representative from the U.S. Virgin Islands, was introduced by Rep. Jim Costa, with whom she serves on the House Agriculture Committee.

Plaskett recently rose to prominence when she was chosen by her former Georgetown law professor and lead manager in Donald Trump’s second impeachment trial, Rep. Jamie Raskin (D–Md.), to be one of the nine impeachment managers in that trial. Plaskett has served as a member of Congress since January 2015.

Plaskett’s half-hour talk, plus about 15 minutes of Q&A, seemed to touch on three themes: the Republican Party’s divisiveness; America’s continual renewal through immigration and the country’s ability to overcome crises; and the inequities the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront and how House and Senate Democrats, along with President Biden and Vice President Harris, are working on behalf of the American people to better their lives post-pandemic.

Plaskett made it clear that Republican “tribalism” and voter suppression are an existential threat to our democracy and that we are still in a fight to preserve it, following the Jan. 6 Insurrection and the sweeping moves of states with Republican legislatures to restrict voting access. This, she said, is why HR 1 (known as S 1 in that body; it has passed the House)—the For the People Act, designed to protect voting rights, limit influence by special interest groups and redesign how Congressional districts—must pass in the Senate. She emphasized there must be mechanisms by Democrats to get out the vote in the 2022 midterm elections.

Plaskett asserted that immigrants are the “American story,” and that the influx of people with diverse backgrounds enables us to “recreate ourselves” through “American grit.” She said that history shows how our nation has overcome crises in the past, including the Civil War, the Influenza pandemic a century ago, the Great Depression and WWII.

Despite GOP resistance and objection, she declared that House and Senate Democrats will move forward with the legislation needed for the nation to recover from the inequities that were “unmasked” by the Covid-19 pandemic. She referenced the irony of how not a single GOP House member or senator voted for the recent rescue bill, yet those same GOP politicians are touting its virtues and taking credit for it.

She noted that the pandemic caused 2.3 million women in this country to lose their jobs and that about half of them are mothers. She emphasized the plans in the proposed nearly \$2 trillion legislation are sweeping and necessary, including repairing and replacing crumbling traditional infrastructure; expanding nontraditional infrastructure, such as broadband Internet access; and spending on climate change, focusing 40% of those funds proposed to assist communities of color disproportionately adversely affected by climate change.

In the Q&A that followed, local activist Pat Brown asked about Plaskett’s transition from Republican to Democrat in late 2008 (she had worked in the Department of Justice under George W. Bush). At that time, she decided the Republican Party was no longer an organization for the discussion of new ideas and that she was tired of the increasingly “entrenched obstinance, bigotry, racism and anti-Semitism.”

She also expressed concern that House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R–Bakersfield) continues to allow “dog-whistle” speech on the floor of the House and stated that women who continue to support former President Trump are his “handmaidens.” However, she added that her former party affiliation enables her to speak “fluent Republican,” which became a strategic skill during Trump’s second impeachment, when, during breaks in the proceedings, she would cross the aisle to speak to some of her former colleagues, whom she described as simultaneously being both “victims and witnesses” to the Jan. 6 Insurrection.

A local school administrator, Summer Gaston Gehris, who was born in the Virgin Islands, inquired about the Virgin Islands’ self-determination and voting rights. Plaskett indicated there is a provision in the aforementioned HR 1 to establish a task force to come up with recommendations for Virgin Islands’ citizen voting and representation.

State Center Community College District Trustee Annalisa Perea asked Plaskett about her hopes for the future of her family and for the nation. Plaskett is hopeful that her 11-year-old daughter will be vaccinated against Covid-19 soon and that the nation will soon reach herd immunity. She also wishes for her husband and four Black sons “to be safe.”

Plaskett hopes that she can come to the San Joaquin Valley soon “to break bread” with fellow Democrats.

Bravery of Kingsburg City Council Member Jewel Hurtado

Kingsburg City Council Member Jewel Hurtado’s bravery is nothing new to her, but we hope you will be enlightened by the time you finish reading this if you are not familiar with her.

Imagine being a young mother and a community college student, barely 20. You’ve decided that with volunteer work and activism already under your belt at this young age, including being a delegate to the California Democratic Convention, you are going to run for City Council in your small, conservative-leaning city in 2018.

It’s time to officially file as a candidate. Officials tell you that you can’t list “community organizer” as your occupation. So, you decide to list “mother,” and officials want to know how many hours per month you are a mother! You throw your hat and heart into the ring, campaign like hell and hope for the best.

It’s a close election, to say the least. You don’t find out that you’ve won until three weeks after the election, and you find this out the day after you’ve just been hired for a job at Victoria’s Secret.

Hurtado won her seat for District 1 on Kingsburg’s City Council in November 2018 by a mere eight votes—the first time Kingsburg elected its City Council representatives by district rather than at-large. Among the congratulatory messages she received was a phone call from another newly elected representative, New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Fast forward two and a half years. On the May 19 agenda: A proposal put forth by Hurtado for the City of Kingsburg to recognize LGBTQ+ Pride Month in Kingsburg in June. Such an action would support young LGBTQ+ people in the area, who often suffer the ills of a society that is against them. It would show that Kingsburg represents all its citizens.

Local Republican operatives got the word out, encouraging opponents to descend on the council meeting to protest the resolution. An overflow crowd of naysayers showed up, including members of the local Proud Boys contingent.

There were the usual public comments on how such an action is against our country, our flag, the Bible and the Kingsburg way of life. There were, and still are, opposing comments on social media directed personally against Hurtado that are not fit to print here.

Hurtado even offered to modify her proposal to exclude flying the Gay Pride flag at Kingsburg City Hall, even though the flag of Sweden is occasionally flown there, acknowledging the city’s roots. Never mind that Sweden was one of the first sovereign nations to legalize same-sex partnerships decades ago. Will Kingsburg eventually stop flying the Swedish flag at City Hall because of that? Sadly, Hurtado’s proposal died for lack of a second.

Despite the actions and words of the hateful and ignorant, Hurtado sparkles. She is undaunted and serves all in her city proudly. She just graduated from Fresno City College with an AA in sociology and is transferring to CSU Bakersfield to work on a bachelor’s degree in sociology through an online program.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY HEADQUARTERS • 1033 U Street • Downtown Fresno • 559-495-0606

dems@fresnocountydemocrats.org • fresnocountydemocrats.org • facebook.com/FresnoCountyDemocrats
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