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House of Representatives

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OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS**U.S. Commitment to "Whole-of-Government" approach to the Pacific Offers Great Promise**

President Obama's Chief of Staff, now Ambassador, Rahm Emanuel famously once said "Never let a crisis go to waste." There is no doubt that the Pacific Islands region is in a crisis and therein lies an unparalleled opportunity for the United States and for the islands. The crisis at hand is China. The opportunity is for the U.S. to reassert leadership by reengaging in the islands while the opportunity for the islands is to make their case for new U.S. strategic investment based on mutual partnerships and climate change concerns. In the process, we should hope that the island countries with their established principles of freedom and democracy will reject China's attempts to implant its values there and turn the region into a theater for big power conflict.

The more engaged partnership promised by the U.S. at the Pacific Islands Summit held in Washington recently is the best hope the world has to convince China to compete openly and cooperate peacefully in Oceania and the international community. China must be impelled to earn friendship, influence and a fair return on honest investment, instead of practicing the dark arts of subversive statecraft leading to economic and political confrontation that escalates risk of conflict.

Opening new embassies, increasing development assistance, sending the Peace Corps back to the islands and bringing students from the Pacific to study in the U.S. are all long overdue but welcome initiatives unveiled at the summit. However, the real deliverable by the U.S. is leadership challenging China when it pretends to tolerate democracy and capitalism only as a strategy to impose Chinese Communist Party control and exploit the free peoples of democratic nations. China can and must be stopped from exporting corruption and disruption as tactics to convert nations dedicated to rule of law one-by-one into surrogate regimes surrendering in servitude to Beijing's totalitarian imperial ambitions.

The promise of the Declaration on U.S.-Pacific Partnership signed by 14 Pacific Island governments was bolstered by the Partners in the Blue Pacific initiative comprising USA, Germany, Japan, Canada, UK, Australia and New Zealand. The summit also may have breathed some new life back into the Pacific Island Forum and paved the way for it and perhaps new multilateral alliances to provide hands-on facilitation of security and defense cooperation, as well as investment and development throughout the region.

The deeper promise of the summit, however, lies in the framework it provides for not just an "all-of-government" effort by Washington, but an "all of region" leadership strategy true to America's historical role in the Pacific, more important now than at any time since WWII. That

includes multilateralism and global cooperation spelled out in the summit instruments, but anyone who understands America's historical and current role in the Pacific knows that when the President signed those instruments it was not just on behalf of Washington. It also was first and foremost a commitment to support the role of Hawaii and the U.S. territories in the Pacific, at the crossroads and on the frontline of America's strategic leadership in the Pacific.

As we now dedicate ourselves to stand with the Pacific community, American Samoa is once again the Polynesian island territory south of the equator in the epicenter of Oceania that is the platform for projection of American interests in the region.

The United States has been far too absent from the region. We have been focused on other issues in other regions, which has led to a lack of investment in and development aid to the Pacific. With the recent declaration by the President, that has changed. The US is today more committed than ever to its Pacific nation roots and its Pacific partners. Too often in the past the State Department, USAID and other agencies with international responsibilities to implement U.S. policy in the Pacific did so with little regard for the American jurisdictions in the region. Likewise, the Interior Department, which has primary federal policy responsibilities for the three U.S. territories and financial obligations to the three Freely Associated States, has done so without taking into account any ramifications of their actions in the neighboring independent nations. Those with a sense of history also took note of support by leaders of Pacific Island nations for words in the Declaration signed by the President recognizing that there is no closer international alliance than the Compact of Free Association between the U.S. and Palau, Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia.

Now, with substantial new resources pledged to the region, it is critical that these resources be dispensed in harmony with U.S. objectives for the region as a whole. To that end, it is important for the relevant committees in Congress to work closely together to ensure that all appropriations are moving in the same direction. For my part, in the next Congress I intend to give priority attention to homeporting a fleet of Coast Guard vessels in American Samoa for rapid deployment throughout the region and to accelerate plans for creation of a state-of-the-art regional medical center that can serve our neighboring countries and ease the burden of medical referrals to Auckland, Sydney, Brisbane and Honolulu. Financing of such a facility should be undertaken jointly by the Departments of Defense, Interior and Veterans Affairs.

As the only Member of Congress who has resided in the Marshall Islands, I was particularly grateful that the Declaration committed the U.S. to additional measures addressing the legacy of 67 nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands between 1946 and 1958. Our family moved to Majuro just three years after those tests concluded and my father, as U.S. administrator, walked in some of those craters that were a legacy of the testing, which consisted of many more tests than any other test site, releasing in one of the most fragile eco-systems and vulnerable human communities on earth more than two thirds of all radiation released by U.S. atomic testing. The U.S. decision not to walk away from its promises to those still displaced island peoples was one of the summit's true moral accomplishments.

Because the U.S. relies on the frontline vigilance of Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, it also has commitments to those communities that Congress and the President must now also be vigilant about meeting and fulfilling. Our Pacific Island people were represented by our President at the summit, and when he signed the Declaration he signed it for us as well. It also did not go unnoticed that Guam Governor Lourdes Leon Guerrero was invited

to the summit just as my father as Governor of American Samoa was invited by President George H.W. Bush to be a member of the U.S. delegation at the very first ever U.S.-Pacific Island Nations summit in Honolulu in October, 1990. Upon her return to Guam, Governor Leon Guerrero announced that Guam, which now has observer status at the Pacific Islands Forum, would be applying for full membership in the region's premier deliberative body.

With America adopting a "whole-of-government" approach to the Pacific, it is only fitting that the island governments adopt a "whole-of-region" approach to its relations with outside powers. My dear friend Samoa Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa said it best when she stressed that outside powers must work through regional institutions, not try to pick off countries one by one. The United States demonstrated at the Washington summit that it intends to heed that admonition.

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