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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-5200

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

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OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

January 27, 2021

President Joseph Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Talofa (Greetings) Mr. President!

Thank you for your outreach to my Congressional office through your Congressional Affairs team to inquire about a few of the upcoming priorities of American Samoa during this first session of the new 117th Congress. As the Congressional representative for American Samoa, I look forward to working productively with your Administration in a bi-partisan manner in the coming weeks, months, and years.

COVID-19 Relief for Territories

The recovery from the COVID-19 emergency and health of our people in American Samoa and across the Country is paramount for our collective mental, physical, and economic health as well as our growth and prosperity. Therefore, I commend your efforts to rapidly distribute vaccines across the states and territories as your priority.

This past year of the COVID-19 virus has been most challenging for everyone around the globe but particularly for those of us in remote locations such as American Samoa 7000 miles from Washington DC. We have been without commercial flights for 10 months and are just beginning the process of repatriating hundreds of our citizens that have been stranded across America trying to get home. Any additional assistance you can provide them as they quarantine in Hawaii en-route back to American Samoa would be greatly appreciated. Your inclusion of funds for the territorial governments along with the states relief components in your proposal is most welcome to aid us during the economic downturn brought on by the virus.

Eliminate Medicaid Caps

Accordingly, the health and welfare of our people is the top priority for American Samoa, and I believe all the territories, by not only continuing but expanding funding of Medicaid for the territories consistent with the States.

So I ask your administration to support the bipartisan bill my territorial colleagues and I introduced, the Insular Areas Medicaid Parity Act, which will "lift the caps" once and for all and sunset the Medicaid funding limitations for the territories. We are still diversifying and developing our economy and are in need of the full force of this key safety net for our respective populations-- which are remote, isolated and suffer from high costs due to challenging logistics of our islands. The

Insular Areas Medicaid Parity Act which my territorial colleagues and I just re-introduced this month would provide that equality. I humbly ask for your support of this most important program be extended to our territory without the caps historically imposed.

Additionally, to effectively combat not only the Pandemic but also the needs of a high-risk population such as ours, modernization of our only hospital, the LBJ Tropical Medical Center is essential and substantial additional federal funding is greatly needed as well. Accordingly, I ask that your budget for the Office of Insular Affairs in the Department of Interior provide a substantial increase for the needs of our LBJ hospital in consultation with our new Governor, Lemanu Peleti Mauga's Administration.

Economic Development and Education

The American Samoan Economic Development Credit /Section 30a tax credit is in need of a multi-year extension as opposed to the annual extension to allow us to attract more and diverse businesses and higher paying knowledge economy jobs. Only a multi-year extension of this job creation credit will incentivize other businesses to invest in creating jobs in a remote community like ours.

In addition to the credit, I am asking for your administration's assistance in developing new technologies and telecommunications infrastructure. As a remote territory the newest in 5G connectivity is especially important in enabling our high school and community college students to keep up with a rapidly changing world. New technologies and funding support for education are the main foundations for our long-term economic development.

Climate and Coral Reef Protection

Finally, we must preserve our planet and our Samoan culture within it and ask that you support my coral reef protection legislation that I recently introduced with several colleagues. NOAA recently announced a record coral reef find in American Samoa's waters, and a bipartisan bill, H.R. 160, to reauthorize the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 and to establish the United States Coral Reef Task Force, was introduced earlier this month. As an original cosponsor, I ask your support for these protections of our coral reefs and environment.

Conclusion

I thank you again President Biden for your Administration's quick and early outreach to my office and your willingness to work in a bipartisan manner for the benefit of all. I look forward to working closely with your intergovernmental, congressional insular affairs teams at the White House, Department of Interior and other agencies over the course of your Administration. May God bless all your work for America and American Samoa.

Sincerely,



Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen
Member of Congress