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FEBRUARY 25, 2014
WASHINGTON DC

HONORABLE SALLY JEWELL, SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Honorable DAVID AGNEW, Deputy Assistant to the President and WHITE HOUSE DIRECTOR OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Adrian Saenz, Deputy Director of Intergovernmental Affairs

MR. NIKOLAO PULA, DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF INSULAR AFFAIRS

HONORABLE GOVERNORS

HONORABLE CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATES AND STAFF REPRESENTATIVES

DIRECTORS AND REPRESENTATIVES FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I bring to you all greetings from the people of American Samoa; and along with their spirit of Talofa, their deepest appreciation for your continued commitment to the improvement of their quality of lives.

The basic challenges confronting American Samoa are no different from those affecting the other insular areas with some unique variations.

American Samoa for example suffers from the tyranny of distance from major sources of raw materials and markets for its final products; thus the impact of energy cost becomes a major disincentive and a significant economic impediment.

I have incorporated in my written submissions, key issues impacting our capacity to forge the achievement of our economic development goals, as well as our healthcare and our educational vision.

I will however point out salient issues which frustrate our efforts to advance our self-sufficiency goals.

We are slowly losing control of our indigenous ocean resources which our people depend on for their subsistence living to supplement little income they receive.

I am speaking specifically of our ocean resources because of the ban placed on our traditional fishing grounds to expand the National Marnie Fisheries Sanctuary Program.

The listing of certain marine species on the endangered species designation without scientific data to validate the need for protection and availing the opportunity to our people to comment on the listing is unsettling.

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I am awaiting word on the status of American Samoa's revised application to access funds made available under President Obama's State Small Business Credit initiative which will revolutionize our economic development and healthcare delivery systems.

I am excited by the prospects of this federal program because it possesses the capacity to positively impact economic development as well as transforming our healthcare system with gradual movement towards private third party healthcare service providers.

I applaud the vision of President Obama inherent in the enactment of the Affordable Care Act; recognizing that seamless access to healthcare services is not precluded by the absence of insurance coverage.

While we are pleased that the residents of the 50 States will benefit from the Affordable Care Act, American Samoa and the other Territories will not realize the same benefits.

For example, American Samoa cannot set up an Insurance Exchange Program, or attach itself to an approved program like the State of Hawaii.

American Samoa also does not qualify or eligible to participate in the federally established and funded Insurance Exchange Program.

Fortunately, funds earmarked for the establishment of an Insurance Exchange Program can be used for our Medicaid Expansion Program along with Section 1108 additional funds to finance our Medicaid Traditional Program; although these funds will lapse by 2019.

We are currently working on proposals to be sent to Honorable Sibelius of the Department of Health and Human Services to engage in two Demonstration Projects and we hope that when the time comes you will place your support behind these two demonstration projects which will comprehensively transform American Samoa's Healthcare System in line with President Obama's Healthcare vision.

Last October the Territorial-wide Education Summit was held and the recommendations emanating from the summit will be officially submitted to you Madame Secretary and Honorable Duncan, Secretary of the Department of Education for consideration and assistance.

I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the wisdom of the decision to hold this forum so the territories and commonwealths have the venue to address issues crucial to their respective development with Federal Officials with authority to influence policy decisions affecting all the insular areas.

I especially wish to recognize your Field Representative in American Samoa Mrs. Lydia Faleafine Nomura whose guidance has been invaluable with regard to steering us towards ensuring compliance with all DOI policies and who has helped us sidestep operational pitfalls.

Thank you Madame Secretary along with your able staff and particularly your director of the Office of Insular affairs Mr. Nikolao Pula for continuing to champion the causes of the Territories and the Commonwealths.

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Your presence Mr. David Agnew in these discussions certainly demonstrates President Obama's commitment to the welfare of the people residing in the Territories and Commonwealths of the United States.

I also wish to thank all the federal agencies who are here today for your support of the programs of the insular areas of the United States.

Finally, want to thank our Congressman Faleomavega Eni Hunkin for his continued dedication to advancing the issues affecting the quality of lives of our people.

Thank You for this opportunity to offer a few remarks.

Soifua