

Members Day Testimony from Congresswoman Amata Radewagen (AS-At Large)
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, & Related Agencies
February 28, 2017 @ 2:30pm in 2007 RHOB

Thank you Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum, I appreciate you allowing me to testify before the subcommittee today.

As the committee knows, the world has changed much since 1974...that's the furthest back we could find records on the program / account to assist American Samoa Government operations: *The Insular Affairs / American Samoa Government Operations Account*.

Since then, the local population has grown, the infrastructure has become dated and in disrepair, and outside influences- particularly China have begun to make inroads into the region with the development of a port in neighboring Independent Samoa and future plans for a Naval base in the same area.

At the same time, recent federal measures have severely threatened the main economic driver on the island, which is the local tuna fishing industry. From the federal mandate to increase the minimum wage on the island...irresponsibly putting American Samoa on the same economic playing field as the United States, to the closing off of large swaths of the ocean which our people have fished for over a millennium, to the disproportionate regulations imposed on U.S. fishing vessels that are not imposed upon foreign vessels in the same waters, it is a wonder that only one of the canneries has decided to close its doors...so far.

As it stands, the amount awarded in the first year of record (1974) for this account was \$13 million...it is now 42 years later and that amount has increased to only \$22 million annually. To give you an idea of just how thin this funding is currently being stretched, ASG operations funded under this program are strictly limited to: Basic Department of Education (DoE) operations; LBJ Tropical Medical Center Operations; American Samoa Community College (ASCC) operations, and High Court operations.

The hospital, which is the only one in the territory, is in such disrepair due to lack of funding, that the VA will not allow our veterans on island to receive care there...and instead must fly them to Hawaii for and foot the bill for their boarding while there for medical treatment, due to the limited number of flights to and from American Samoa each week.

If adjusted for inflation the current amount would be \$64 million annually. The good that this increase would do, cannot be overstated and would be utilized to improve the conditions at the only hospital on the island, as well as other needed improvements to those entities I just listed.

I respectfully request that the committee increase the requested funding level of \$22,000,000.00 to \$64,000,000.00. An increase of \$42,000,000.00 to address the many funding shortfalls currently affecting ASG operations. While I understand that this is a dramatic one-year increase; it would simply rectify the long over-due adjustment for inflation and allow for much needed maintenance and upgrades to existing facilities.

Also to give you an idea of just how disproportionate the funding is not only between American Samoa and the states, but the other territories as well; just last week the *Department of the Interior* sent an adjustment to the U.S. Virgin Islands in the amount of \$18.2 million for their Rum Excise Taxes for Fiscal Year 2016, bringing their total excise tax revenues to \$231.5 Million for the year. It is of note that the U.S. Virgin Islands population is only double that of American Samoa, yet their excise tax benefits are currently 10 and a half times that of my home district.

I point this out not to do any disservice to the Virgin Islands funding level, as I know they need all they receive, but to simply point out just how underfunded American Samoa has been.

Please know that I am happy to answer any questions you may have and look forward to working with you both to ensure that the good people of American Samoa are afforded the same opportunities and resources as their counterparts.

I want to thank you both again for your time and consideration of my request. While not a very large amount in the grand scheme of things, this increase would do so much good for the people of American Samoa.

Fa'afetai tele lava

I yield back the balance of my time.