

Rep. Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen (American Samoa- AT LARGE)
Member Day Testimony for FY 23 to the
Appropriations Interior Subcommittee

Thank you Chair Pingree and Ranking Member Joyce for the opportunity to testify on behalf of an increase for the American Samoan operations account at the Department of Interior Office of Insular Affairs for Fiscal Year 2023.

While the worst is behind most states on the mainland USA, 7000 miles away in the Pacific Omicron rages. American Samoa is at its worst state since the pandemic outbreak, with over 4000 new cases in the past few weeks. The Governor has implemented a code red lockdown which will last for the foreseeable future.

The Federal Government has responded quickly and forcefully. I accompanied a FEMA response team to American Samoa a few weeks ago, and we in American Samoa appreciate their support as our health care system has been overwhelmed.

FEMA had to contract 40 healthcare professionals: doctors, nurses and technicians just to help us out at our hospital, which the Army Corps has reported to Congress is in a state of “abject failure.”

Adding to the difficulties, over 1000 of my constituents were stranded away from home for more than one year when our borders were closed as a protective measure against the pandemic.

I, myself, could not get back to my own district for 16 months-can you imagine that? Even when I had the opportunity to travel home with the FEMA team, it was for a short time as I was called back to Washington.

I humbly ask this Committee to help us get a functioning hospital which is a primary charge of the DOI/OIA/ASG account. Additional funding will be needed from other agencies such as DOD, VA, HHS, and the local government.

But it this committee’s help that is crucial as Interior is the lead. I hope that this Committee can work with other agencies to find comprehensive funding consistent with the ARMY Corps findings reported to Congress almost 3 years ago.

Inflation and Covid have taken their toll physically and economically in American Samoa.

Our tourism is mostly eco-and adventure tourism to the American Samoan national park with family run inns and bed and breakfasts, family businesses that were hit especially hard.

We were last to receive unemployment relief --months after the rest of country was getting their last checks we were getting our first-- because it took that long for the labor department to implement the program. Similarly, we were shut out of the initial rounds of PPP and EIDL small business funds.

Adjustments were made and the American Rescue Plan and other Covid relief measures have been a significant aid the past 2 years, inflation is exacerbated in marine based island economies where food and fuel must be shipped in.

And local fishermen's fuel costs have skyrocketed while the Chinese continue to illegally fish around our EEZ and marine monuments, seizing even more market share while we play fairly by the international rules that restrict our fishing days.

So, I ask you, Chair Pingree and Ranking Member Joyce, to please look at the well documented record of the Army Corps of Engineers findings for the need for hospital funding and proffered options that range in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

I am most appreciative of the subcommittee's past work to provide increases. I hope that the Committee can agree that those needs remain and have only increased. Some offset of these recent inflationary pressures is needed. And The Army Corps report spells out the replacement needs.

These funds are dedicated to the health and education of our local community which continues to lead the nation in per capita recruitment to the United States Army from our high school ranks.

We are a proud people always ready to serve our country.

Thank you both for your time and consideration of the people of American Samoa.