

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ENI F. H. FALEOMAVAEGA BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

**May 7, 2013**

Chairman McKeon & Ranking Member Smith:

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your leadership and for giving me the opportunity to testify before the House Armed Services Committee this afternoon.

I testify today to request your assistance to include language in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2014. The language will instruct the Department of Defense (DoD) to conduct a feasibility study for the establishment of a National Guard Unit (NGU) in American Samoa.

For your information, American Samoa is one of two U.S. territories that does not have a NGU. The other is the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Recently, I have been in discussions with the American Samoa Government who have expressed great interest in establishing an NGU in the Territory. This comes as a necessity for the American Samoa Government after reviewing and restructuring response plans for state emergencies as a result of hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and tsunamis.

In 2009, American Samoa was hit by a powerful earthquake that was registered at a high 8.3 on the Richter scale. The earthquake set off a massive tsunami that crashed into the Territory and neighboring countries of the Independent State of Samoa and the Kingdom of Tonga. The tsunami created a devastating trail that wiped out many villages and took many lives. Although an Army Reserve Component is based in American Samoa, it was not able to mobilize or be activated immediately because such a decision had to be made by the Pentagon. The Governor at the time could only make a request for assistance but only after the declaration of emergency.

I strongly believe that much more could have been done to help, save, and support the local residents during the disaster if only the Governor was able to activate such a critical tool of a NGU. As we all know, the National Guard is a vital component of public safety, especially their role as the first responders during state of emergencies and, importantly, supporting our regular armed forces during time of war. The National Guard has been a part of our U.S. military history for hundreds of years. We have witnessed the exemplary response by the National Guard during Hurricane Katrina in 2005 to the recent tragic bombings in Boston.

During the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, I introduced H.R. 6294 to establish a NGU in American Samoa but the Committee took no further action. Given the recent reduction in federal spending and expected cuts in defense, I prefer that the DoD first conduct a feasibility study for establishing a NGU in American Samoa. The feasibility study will provide a better understanding of costs, funding sources, as well as necessary support that would be needed to establish and maintain such a unit in the Territory. I am hopeful that in the study, DoD can also review other options of possibly creating an attached unit to the Hawaii National Guard. This is viable given the close relationship between American Samoa and the State of Hawaii, and the Army Reserve infrastructure that already exists.

I know that this Committee understands deeply the sense of service and contributions that American Samoa has made to our U.S. military. Being one of the highest enlistment rates per capita in any State or U.S. Territory, our sons and daughters have served in record numbers in every U.S. military engagement from World War II to our present operations in Afghanistan. We have stood by the U.S. in good times and bad, and I know that taking this initial step in establishing a National Guard Unit in American Samoa will make our relationship even stronger.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify this afternoon and I look forward to answering any of your questions.