

Good afternoon. Thank you to all our witness for participating in today's hearing, including two former Committee Members, Dr. Donna Christensen from the Virgin Islands and former Governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Fortuño.

Dr. Christensen was a senior territorial delegate when I was first elected to Congress. She gave up chairing the then Insular Affairs Subcommittee in this Committee to go on to Energy and Commerce for the express purpose of working to provide Medicaid parity for the territories. Welcome Donna and Luis. It is good to see you both.

In today's hearing, we will be focusing on the historical inequities of the application of federal programs in the U.S. Territories – Puerto Rico, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands – and what we can do to obtain parity for Americans who call the territories home.

Earlier this year, I joined Chair Grijalva and all territory delegates in a letter to the Administration requesting that federal programs be expanded to the territories and included in the President's budget.

We explained that Americans residing in U.S. Territories face longstanding barriers that limit or exclude them from equal access to Medicaid, the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, the Supplemental Nutrition Access Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. And that expanding eligibility in these important federal programs to residents of U.S. Territories aligns with President Biden's commitment to providing equal opportunity to all Americans and ending systemic racism.

I am extremely grateful to President Biden for agreeing with us and acknowledging the need for territory parity by proposing in his

budget request for fiscal 2022, equal application of Medicaid, SSI, and SNAP.

The extension of these and other federal assistance programs to the territories is crucial to improving the health care, nutrition, and overall quality of life for nearly three and a half million Americans.

This was truly welcome news for those of us who has been advocating for this for many years. I am sure that all territory representatives in Congress, former and current, have worked on bringing state-like treatment for programs to the insular areas.

Even though the President's budget does not contain specific funding recommendations, we welcome this historic step and must do what is necessary to deliver on the President's commitment to advance equity and provide the required help to the substantially underserved, largely minority communities in the territories.

The President's call for parity comes just months before all the territories face a Medicaid funding cliff. Supplemental funds expire at the end of this fiscal year. Federal Medicaid matching rates in the territories are much lower than those provided to states and Medicaid funds are subjected to an annual cap.

Just last week, the Energy and Commerce Committee approved Congressman Soto's bipartisan bill to extend supplemental Medicaid funds for the territories through 2029. Under the terms of this bill, the Northern Marianas will receive over \$482 million in Medicaid funding over the next eight years.

While this bill is absolutely welcome and appreciated, the ultimate goal is to make its provisions permanent and to do the same with SNAP, SSI, and other programs.

I recognize that some may not see the rationale for holding a hearing on policy matters outside Natural Resources' jurisdiction. I would remind those who hold this view that all matters regarding the U.S. insular areas are well within this Committee's jurisdiction.

I would also point out that we held a hearing in this Committee in May 2019 to discuss the "Medicaid cliff" that all the insular areas were facing that year – which unfortunately we are facing again – putting the health of thousands of low-income Americans at risk – during a pandemic. Medicaid and health care officials from all the territories testified on the life-and-death consequences on cutting off supplemental Medicaid funding.

That hearing was quickly followed by one in the Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee where territory Medicaid directors again testified.

The hearings indeed made an impact. We lit a fire under the Medicaid issue, extended supplemental funding for two years and, quite likely, save some lives.

President Biden's call for parity for the territories is a crucial first step for equal treatment for Americans in non-state areas.

We must capitalize on the momentum that the President's pledge has provided, starting with today's hearing.

Now, let me yield to the Vice Ranking Member.