

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)  
Questions for the Record for the Hearing  
“Examining the Implementation of the  
Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024”  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**September 10, 2024**

Questions for the Record from Representative Westerman:

*Questions for Dr. Miguel LaPuz, Special Assistant to the Deputy Under Secretary  
for Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

**QUESTION 1: The Compacts of Free Association Amendments Act was signed into law on March 9, 2024, of this year and includes provisions to address the lack of access to healthcare benefits for veterans from the Freely Associated States (FAS) who have served in the U.S. armed forces.**

**The law requires the Department of Veterans Affairs, beginning on the date of enactment, to conduct robust outreach to and engage with each government of the Freely Associated States.**

**It has been six months since the enactment.**

**1a. How many meetings has the Department of Veterans Affairs held with each respective FAS government since March?**

**VA Response:** The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has met with Ambassadors from the Federated States of Micronesia at least three times, including April 8, September 17, and October 17 of this year. VA has also met with Ambassadors or representatives from the Republic of Palau at least twice including, April 18 and October 15 of this year, and VA has met with Ambassadors or representatives from the Republic of the Marshall Islands twice, including April 18 and October 3 of this year. This information does not include email exchanges.

**1b. Are there plans for the Department to hold meetings and formal negotiations with the FAS governments before the end of this calendar year? If so, when specifically?**

**VA Response:** VA held a kickoff meeting on October 17 with each of the Freely Associated States (FAS) governments to set up the regular cadence of meetings going forward. VA is scheduled to meet with the Federated States of Micronesia on November 20. VA is awaiting response from the Republic of Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands on the proposed meeting dates of November 14, 18, and 25. The purpose of the

meetings is to gather information and understand conditions relevant to VA's provision of care. VA will work with interagency partners throughout this process.

**QUESTION 2: As you are aware, the Interagency Group for the Freely Associated States was formed to coordinate the development and implementation of Compact of Free Association (COFA).**

**This group includes the Secretaries of State and the Interior who serve as co-chairs, the Secretaries of Defense and Treasury, and other heads of relevant Federal agencies carrying out COFA obligations.**

**2a. Who has the Department of Veterans Affairs designated as their representative for the Interagency Group?**

**VA Response:** Ms. Zaneta Adams, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Intergovernmental Affairs, is the representative for the Interagency Group.

**2b. Can you commit today that you will raise the issues discussed in this hearing at the next formal meeting?**

**VA Response:** Yes, VA will continue to raise the issues discussed in the hearing at future meetings if needed. VA raised these issues at the last meeting held on September 12, 2024, and will continue to engage appropriately at future meetings of the Interagency Group.

**QUESTION 3: During the hearing, you were asked to provide a specific date we can expect the Department of Veterans Affairs to carry out services in the Freely Associated States. However, your response did not include a specific date. Can you please provide a specific date for when the Department of Veterans Affairs will carry out services in the Freely Associated States?**

**VA Response:** VA is working expeditiously to develop a framework that would enable it to provide health care services and beneficiary travel benefits in the FAS based on the COFA Amendments Act of 2024, with a view to doing so in the third quarter of fiscal year (FY) 2026. This timeline is contingent upon multiple variables, including relevant domestic processes, and FAS governments engagement.

Questions for the Record from Representative Case:

*Questions for Dr. Miguel LaPuz, Special Assistant to the Deputy Undersecretary for Health, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

**QUESTION 1: You said in your testimony regarding healthcare delivery in the Freely Associated States (FAS) that the "VA is now ready to begin direct coordination with the FAS governments. During the next several months, we will be regularly meetings with the FAS governments to conduct a comprehensive**

**environmental scan to review the current state of hospital care and medical services within the FAS.” My office sent the VA a letter urging the acceleration of in-country healthcare services to our veterans living in the FAS in May, to which the VA’s response on August 6 was just that the VA is “actively assessing how to implement the authority provided by the COFA Amendments Act” without any additional information. Meanwhile, my office has received reports that communication from the VA to the FAS governments has been insufficient thus far.**

**How are you going to ensure that communication on this issue, both with the FAS governments and Congress, improves going forward? Additionally, what is your detailed timeline for the provision of comprehensive care to our veterans living in the FAS?**

**VA Response:** VA developed an outreach plan outlining engagement with the FAS Governments which was shared with Congress on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024. Outreach efforts will include recurring meetings between VA, relevant interagency partners, and the FAS governments; quarterly (or as needed) updates to Congress and other key stakeholders; and listening sessions and town halls in the FAS to hear from Veterans.

Engagement with the FAS governments commenced on October 17. VA is working expeditiously on these issues with a view to begin providing health care services and beneficiary travel benefits in the FAS based on the COFA Amendments Act of 2024 starting in the third quarter of FY 2026. This timeline is contingent upon multiple variables, including relevant domestic processes, and FAS government engagements.

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
November 2024**