



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

DEC 20 2024

The Honorable Harriet M. Hageman
Chair
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Hageman:

Enclosed are responses to questions for the record submitted to the Department of the Interior's witness, John Brewer, Director for the Office of Insular Affairs, following his appearance on September 10, 2024, before your Subcommittee at an oversight hearing titled "*Examining the Implementation of the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024.*" These responses were prepared by the Office of Insular Affairs.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to you on these matters.

Sincerely,

Pamela L. Barkin
Legislative Counsel
Office of Congressional and
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Teresa Leger Fernández
Ranking Member

Questions for the Record
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs
Oversight Hearing on “*Examining the Implementation of the Compact of Free Association
Amendments Act of 2024.*”
September 10, 2024

Questions from Chairman Westerman

Question 1: The Department of the Interior plays a lead role in administering and implementing the various provisions of the Compacts agreements. The Department is also responsible for overseeing the disbursement and use of Compact funds.

- a. Can you provide specific examples on how the Department of the Interior has been overseeing and managing Compact funds to make sure that they are being used for the intended purpose?**

Response: Each country has a Compact with the United States and other subsidiary agreements, including a fiscal procedures agreement, which are tailored to each country and enable robust management and oversight of the funds. Specifically, the review by the Department of the Interior (DOI) and other agencies that participate in the Joint Economic Management Committees or annual economic consultations of “Annual Implementation Plans” and the use of quarterly and annual financial reports from the freely associate state (FAS) countries are key tools, along with annual performance reports, that help ensure that funds are used for the intended purpose. Additionally, all Compact assistance is subject to Single Audits under the terms of the relevant agreements with each country, requiring financial statements and ensuring consistency with similar federal requirements. DOI grants managements staff also undertake regular site visits to Compact-funded projects and programs. DOI has six full-time employees (two in-country based at U.S. Embassies) dedicated to the monitoring and oversight of the Compact assistance provided to each FAS country.

Question 2: As you are aware, the Interagency Group for the Freely Associated States was formed to coordinate the development and implementation of 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.

Your department serves as one of the co-chairs of the group.

- 1. Who has the Department of the Interior designated as their representative for the Interagency Group?**

Response: Assistant Secretary – Insular and International Affairs Carmen G. Cantor

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

Response: Yes.

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Question 3: In the hearing, you mentioned that all agencies have listed guidance for carrying out the services and obligations mandated under the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024. However, Ambassador Jackson Soram of the Federated States of Micronesia stated in his testimony that the Social Security Administration (SSA) has not issued guidance for the Social Security Income (SSI) program.

- a. Can you please confirm if the SSA has issued guidance for the SSI program? If so, when has this been issued and where can we find this guidance?**
- b. If guidance has not been issued, why did the Department of the Interior believe that the SSA did issue guidance? Will the Department of the Interior commit to carry out its responsibilities as the primary agency charged with administering and implementing the Compact of Free Association (COFA), and to keep close track of all COFA-related obligations?**
- c. If SSA guidance has not been issued, can the Department of the Interior commit to coordinate with the SSA to ensure that the SSA issues guidance for the SSI program in a timely manner?**

Response: On June 5, 2024, the Social Security Administration (SSA) issued initial instructions to employees, available publicly here: [EM-24024 SEN](#), *Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Eligibility for Citizens of the Compact of Free Association States (CFA)*.

SSA is working on additional processing instructions now.

Question 4: The Department of the Interior’s webpage on the Interagency Group for the Freely Associated States currently has no documents, calendar, or any information on the activities of the Interagency Group.

- a. If the working group did convene back in April, why has no information on this or minutes from the meeting been shared to anyone other than the attendees?**
- b. When will the website be updated? What information can we expect to be provided on the website?**

Response: Section 208(d)(6) of the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024 (P.L. 118-42) requires the President to annually submit to Congress a report that describes the activities and recommendations of the Interagency Group during the applicable year. The first report is due 1 year after the date of enactment, which will be March 9, 2025. OIA will post this report on its website following its transmission to Congress.

The web pages referenced were created well before the passage of the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024. These inactive pages will be removed.