

**TESTIMONY OF AMBASSOR JACKSON T. SORAM
OF THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA**

House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs
Implementation of the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024

January 14, 2026

Washington, D.C.

Chairman Westerman (R-AR), Ranking Member Huffman (D-CA), Subcommittee Chair Hurd (R-CO), Ranking Member Leger Fernandez (D-NM), and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for convening this hearing and for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the implementation of the *Compact of Free Association (COFA) Amendments Act*. My name is Jackson Soram, and I have the distinct honor of serving as the Ambassador of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) to the United States.

The United States and the FSM enjoy a close, mutually beneficial relationship, with long held diplomatic, economic, and military partnerships and commitments underpinned by the Compact of Free Association, or COFA. The bond between our two countries was reinforced in 2024 when Congress voted unanimously to update key provisions of the Compact for another 20-year period through the *COFA Amendments Act*. This critical law provides key updates and extends economic assistance provisions which will help the FSM build a more prosperous self-sustaining economy. The updated Compact agreement also restores and extends other important federal benefits for FSM citizens in the United States. We are extremely grateful for the multi-year efforts by this committee and other congressional champions to secure the passage of the Act, as well as your dedication to upholding U.S. commitments under COFA and ensuring proper implementation of the agreement.

On behalf of the FSM government, I would also like to highlight the U.S. Department of War's (DOW) planned infrastructure investments in the State of Yap, which was announced by our two governments in March of 2024. As we look ahead, we are pleased to continue our collaboration with DOW on these projects to advance our shared security and defense priorities in the Indo-Pacific region. Projects such as these would not have been possible without the continued success of the Compact in bringing our nations closer together than ever before.

Shifting to the focus of today's hearing, I am pleased to provide an update on the implementation of the amended Compact agreement. As you may know, the agreement provides annual sector grant funding in key areas to support essential health, education, and infrastructure projects that are critical for our Nation. Among other things, the sector grants help support our hospitals and clinics, assist in the funding of our educational system, and support critical infrastructure improvement projects for roads and bridges.

We are also grateful to the United States for its additional contributions to the Compact Trust Fund following passage of the COFA Amendments Act. This infusion helps provide the Compact Trust Fund with a solid foundation for the future. Your government's generous contributions are

critical to supporting the FSM in its efforts for the long-term budgetary self-reliance for our nation.

Since the COFA Amendments Act was signed into law, the FSM has worked closely with current and previous administrations on implementation of key benefits and programs authorized under the law. In 2024, several agencies implemented guidance and issued notices relating to the restoration of public benefits for the FSM – including social safety net programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and financial assistance from FEMA for FSM citizens working and studying in the United States who are affected by natural disasters.

Additionally, we have worked with the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services (HHS) on the continuation and restoration of key programs benefiting FSM students, including Pell Grants, Federal Work-Study (FWS) and the Federal Supplemental Educational Grant Program (FSEOG), and Head Start. We appreciate Congress's support through the Continuing Resolution to provide anomaly funding for the Head Start program.

While many elements of the new agreement have been implemented expeditiously, our government has encountered some challenges, including the implementation of the Department of Veterans Affairs' new legislative authorities to provide certain healthcare services to veterans residing in the FSM who have earned these benefits.

As you may know, the FSM is extremely proud to have one of the highest enlistment rates per capita in the U.S. military. However, our veterans have, for decades after fulfilling their service and returning home, faced significant cost and access barriers to VA healthcare. We were very pleased that the amended Compact agreement included language from the bipartisan and bicameral *Care for COFA Veterans Act*, granting the VA new authorities to provide FAS veterans with enhanced access to care, such as telehealth, beneficiary travel, and mail order pharmacy services. Unfortunately, the VA has yet to implement these authorities.

Despite months of positive discussions with the VA, which commenced on the heels of this Committee's last oversight hearing in September 2024, we were disappointed when the Department suddenly decided to suspend talks with the FSM government in April 2025. We stand ready to restart talks and finalize the agreement as soon as possible. We are grateful to the Committee for its continued interest and support on the issue. We were pleased to see legislation introduced in both chambers (*U.S. Vets of the FAS Act* (H.R. 6652) and *Caring for Veterans and Strengthening National Security Act* (S.3436)) and to see the passage of the Senate bill in December. We look forward to working with Congress and the Trump Administration to ensure FSM veterans gain improved access to the veterans' healthcare benefits they have earned through their service, and to ensure that the VA's implementation of these provisions is consistent with the intent of the Compact legislation as unanimously approved by Congress.

In closing, I would like to highlight the importance of restoring the U.S. Peace Corps program in the FSM. We appreciate the support from members of this committee who have advocated for the restoration of the program in the FAS. For decades, the Peace Corps program in the FSM has contributed to our economic development and helped foster deep diplomatic and cultural ties

between our nations. We look forward to continuing to work with Congress on this priority issue and the continued COFA implementation in the months ahead.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.