

Rep. Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen (American Samoa- AT LARGE)
Member Day Testimony for FY 23 to the
Appropriations State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee

Thank you, Chairwoman Lee and Ranking Member Rogers, for the opportunity to testify today on the need of an increase of U.S. investment in the Pacific Island region in the FY2023 appropriations bill.

The United States is a Pacific Island nation. We have been a Pacific Island nation for over a hundred years. However, since the end of the Cold War we have forgotten our commitments to the region.

Unfortunately, in that time new challenges have arisen in the region. China is increasingly making their presence felt – in neighboring Samoa they've invested in building a dual use airport – less than 80 miles from American Samoa!

But it's not just Samoa that China is influencing, just earlier this year, China signed a security agreement with the Solomon Islands – but not did do so transparently. Active U.S. involvement can prevent other small Pacific Island states from being taken advantage of by China.

However, China does not represent the existential threat to the Pacific like climate change does. Rising sea levels threaten to completely cover some islands in the near future. Every small Pacific Island country says that climate change is their biggest national security concern.

And it's not just climate change that is threatening Pacific Island countries – COVID-19 has completely isolated many Pacific Island countries, whom don't have the resources incase of a major outbreak.

We, as the United States, have the ability to counter act the threats of China, climate change, and COVID in the SFOPs appropriations bill. We need a unified whole of government Indo-Pacific strategy that addresses the concerns of our neighbors in the region.

I humbly ask that the committee increase funding of accounts and programs that engage the U.S. in the Pacific.

Such programs include Development Assistance, Diplomatic Programs, International Disaster Assistance, Education and Cultural Exchange Programs.

These accounts fund programs that allow the United States to develop bonds with government officials and civil society of Pacific Island countries. One of which I'm passionate about is the

Young Pacific Leaders program which strengthens bonds of the Pacific's future leaders with young leaders in the United States. These bonds are important for future generations.

Another which I care about, is education scholarships for Pacific Island students – China is greatly out competing us on this front. They are providing education to young Pacific Islander students, who then go on to work in the governments of Pacific Island countries. We can compete! We have the best universities in the world, and we can provide that education with scholarships to Pacific Island students.

For the United States to maintain and deepen its relationships in the region, we must put real resources towards our diplomatic presence, partnerships for development, and engagement with civil society.

Thank you for your time and for consideration of the needs of the people of the Pacific.

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