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Member Day Testimony for FY 24 to the
Appropriations State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee

Thank you, Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee, for the opportunity to testify today on the need of an increase of U.S. investment in the Pacific Island region in the FY2024 appropriations bill.

The United States is a Pacific Island nation. We have been a Pacific Island nation for over a hundred years; The day starts over the skies of Guam and the Marianas and ends in my home, the pearl of the Pacific, American Samoa. However, since the end of the Cold War we have forgotten our commitments to the region.

Over the past year, we as a country have began making overtures to our Pacific Island neighbors, with many Pacific Island leaders meeting with both the Administration and Congressional leaders in the fall.

We have a great chance this year to further engage – we just signed Memorandums of Understandings with the Freely Associated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Palau, to continue the Compacts of Free Association.

However, words only go so far – now is the time for action. The PRC is watching, and any failure to capitalize on our recent engagements with the Pacific Islands will be swiftly filled by the PRC.

The State Department has just opened an embassy in the Solomon Islands – with more embassies planned in the region. However, those embassies require staff and funding to be effective. For an example, we technically have an embassy in neighboring Independent Samoa, but it has a skeleton crew staff, with the Ambassador being in New Zealand. However, the PRC has a 3 story building, one of the largest in the country, and it's fully staffed! If we expect to compete with the PRC, we need to take our diplomacy seriously.

Today, I humbly ask that the Committee support U.S. engagement in the Pacific, with \$150 million for the Pacific Islands, matching Fiscal Year 2023 funding. This funding is essential for expanding an American footprint in the region and ensuring a Free and Open Pacific.

Each dollar that the United States invests in the Pacific, prevents my Island neighbors from being exploited by the PRC.

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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