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“Governor Testifies Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.”

“American Samoa faces challenges in expediting these emergency funds. We seek relief of matching local funds. We ask for a more flexible usage of categories of federal funding to be reallocated locally.”

On February 1, 2022, Governor Lemanu testified before the United States Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, chaired by Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia. Ranking member Senator Robert Marshall sat in for Senator John Barrasso. In his opening remarks, Mr. Marshall spoke of how critical it is to remember how important the island Territories have been as a strategic part of the United States in the Pacific.

Governor Lemanu set out the priorities for the territory for 2022, starting with American Samoa's efforts in fighting COVID-19. Governor Lemanu recognized the Government's ability to find effective ways to limit the spread of inbound COVID-19 cases in the territory. Governor Lemanu expressed how ASG successfully combined technology and policy to build a robust pre-screening and testing procedures of inbound travelers to American Samoa. He focused on climate change and creating a more resilient infrastructure with our sea and air ports, and the importance of building a new hospital. He also addressed the challenges that have resulted in the closure of borders, delay of transshipment, and inflation.

Following his testimony, Governor Lemanu remarked, "It is important to understand the opportunities that the Build Back Better bill and ARPA funds will provide for the territory. The territory will be able to improve efforts in the areas of Global Warming, Education, Health, Transportation, Security, and our basic daily needs. But we also need to open the discussion of how American Samoa faces challenges with the allocation of some of these funds, and what our priorities are moving forward."

During his testimony, Governor Lemanu stated, "...American Samoa faces challenges in expediting these emergency funds. We seek relief of matching local funds. We ask for a more flexible usage of categories of federal funding to be reallocated locally. And due to isolation, shipping transportation for goods, fuel, and building materials, which are not consistent and currently very slow, especially the recent high cost of supplies, we are requesting an extension for the end date or life of fundings."

Fellow territories recognized how "the Territories are usually treated unfairly by statute." Governor Bryan of the Virgin Islands spoke about how, typically with large amounts of federal funds, territories usually would find challenges in allocating, distributing, and categorizing funds. Most funds are categorized using a formula-based method or leveraged by local matching. Other Governor's testified how the pandemic has affected tourism and has delayed infrastructure projects.

The committee members asked territories to address a vast amount of information on inflation, vaccination rates, and how the Federal Government improved. Also, issues concerning China's presence, local economies, and immigration.

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