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### **The Opening Ceremony of the Legislature of American Samoa, 39th Legislature - First Regular Session, January 13, 2025.**

The 39th seating of the American Samoa Legislature was officially opened on Monday, January 13, with a special ceremony at the Rex Lee Auditorium. The event was attended by the newly elected Honorable Governor Pulaali'i Nikolao Pula, Honorable Lt. Governor Pulu Ae Ae Jr., Senate President Honorable Tuaolo Manaia Fruean, Speaker of the House Honorable Savali Talavou Ale, Senators, House Representatives, Chief Justice Honorable Lealaialoa Michael Kruse, Acting Directors of the Cabinet, and distinguished guests.

Upon the arrival of Governor Pulaali'i, the presentation of colors was conducted by the Department of Public Safety Police Color Guard Unit, followed by the National Anthems of the

United States and American Samoa, sung by the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa (CCCAS) Amaluia choir. The Speaker of the House formally delivered the Call to Order and officially declared the opening of the 39th Legislature, First Regular Session. In his opening remarks, the Speaker extended a warm welcome to the Governor and his administration, members of the Fono, and distinguished guests in attendance for this special occasion. He then invited Reverend Elder Fa'aeteete Saifoloi of CCCAS Amaluia to deliver the invocation.

The Honorable Governor Pulaali'i, in his State of the Territory Address, noted that today marks the seventh day since the new administration assumed office. Quoting Roman Governor Mark Antony, he stated, "I have come to bury Caesar, not to praise him." He emphasized that the purpose of this administration is not to focus on the shortcomings of the previous administration or to seek accolades for itself, but to serve the people of our territory with integrity and honest governance." The Honorable Governor highlighted a brief overview of the challenges faced by ASG at the moment: "We are experiencing financial problems in government operations, caused by revenue decreases in combination with excessive spending in the past. We are taking a close look at the government revenue projections and opportunities, where I will report to the Fono when we have a clearer picture. In the meantime, we must take action, as revenues will not be as high as projected in the FY 2025 approved budget." Governor Pulaali'i further highlighted the government's ongoing challenges in meeting payroll obligations every two weeks. He explained that specific financial sacrifices and measures have been implemented to ensure that ASG employee paychecks are honored without issue. Furthermore, the Governor emphasized additional financial challenges contributing to the government's fiscal difficulties, including nearly \$9 million in debt owed to the Retirement Office, outstanding payments to ASPA, and delays in subsidies to ASCC. Amid these challenges, Governor Pulaali'i expressed confidence that ASG will overcome them through transparent processes designed to effectively address these outstanding issues, and to stay true to their promise to the people if they were elected by conducting a forensic audit of ASG and ensured that the Fono would be kept informed of this promise. Given the present adversities, Governor Pulaali'i reaffirmed his commitment by invoking the concluding words of his inauguration oath, 'So help me God,' pledging to uphold his duties and guide our territory through these financial challenges. The Honorable Governor concluded his address by saying, "The responsibility of the government cannot be accomplished without the support of the Fono. The Honorable Lieutenant Governor and I genuinely seek and pray for your steadfast support for our administration as we work diligently to serve the people of American Samoa."

In response to the Honorable Governor's Address, speaking on behalf of the Fono Senate President Honorable Tualo Mania Fruean said "Governor and Lt. Governor, if you both look around the house today, the Fono is locked and loaded, ready to fire!" This indicated that the Fono is prepared to extend the necessary support to the new administration. The Senate President added, "Please ensure to keep HOPE alive, and as Plato said, the stronger the wind the higher the

bird flies. So, Governor and Lt Governor fly high but follow the law.” The Senate President addressed the Governor and his administration with a challenge concerning the issues raised, stating: "The Fono seeks a clear understanding of our financial standing so we can provide our people with the honest truth they deserve. We trust that it is God's will that you have been chosen to lead our government, and we have faith in your ability to resolve these challenges. There must be one law that applies equally to everyone." The Senate President in conclusion said "Our door is always open to both of you for consultation, and we warmly welcome your engagement. I leave with a saying from one of the archbishops: May you both serve the people, but not the people to serve you.”

The special ceremony concluded with a benediction delivered by Reverend Elder Saifoloi. The 39th Legislature will reconvene tomorrow at 9:00 a.m. to begin its regular 45-day session.

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