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## **American Samoa Resilience Commission and Governor’s Resilience Office Welcomes U.S. Government Accountability Office to the Territory**

*“The commission meets quarterly and wishes to extend the invitation to our federal partners. This allows and ensures you have immediate accessibility to government leaders to address issues as part of your mission.”*



*Acting Governor Talauega Eleasalo Va’alele Ale shaking hands and welcoming GAO Senior Analyst Su Jin Yon*

On Tuesday, January 17, 2023, the American Samoa Resilience Commission (ASRC) and the Governor’s Resilience Office (GRO) held an in-person meeting with federal partners of the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) at the Tauese P. F. Sunia Ocean Center in Utulei. The Master of Ceremony was GRO Acting Director John Maiava and performing the benediction and

invocation was Rev. Mageo Patolo Mageo. Federal partners in attendance included the following:

- **Latesha Love-Grayer**, Director of GAO's International and Trade Affairs team
- **Joseph Carney**, Assistant Director in GAO's International and Trade Affairs team
- **Pedro Almoguera**, Economist and Assistant Director in the Center for Economics of GAO's Applied Research and Methods team
- **Colson Sutherland**, Analyst in GAO's Strategic Issue team
- **Su Jin Yon**, Senior Analyst in GAO's International and Trade Affairs team



In his remarks, MWR Director and ASRC Co-Vice Chairman Taotasi Archie Soliai, welcomed the GAO team to American Samoa. Here, he expressed the importance of the Commission by reiterating its mission:

*American Samoa recognizes the urgency of climate impacts with grave concerns and the need to respond quickly and strategically to ensure the protection, adaptive capacity, resilience, and well-being of the islands and residents of American Samoa.*

“The commission meets quarterly and wishes to extend the invitation to our federal partners,” stated Acting Governor Talauega in his special remarks. He continued, “This allows and ensures you have immediate accessibility to government leaders to address issues as part of your mission. As a small island in the middle of the ocean, we feel the effects of climate change every day. We see it in the rising tides, and we feel it in the increased heat in the day. We are mindful of the constant change, and have refocused our efforts through this commission.”

The meeting continued with both local and federal leaders discussing issues, proposed solutions, and American Samoa's best practices. One of the issues discussed was the lack of a fair playing field when island territories compete against states for federal funding.



To conclude the first day, directors and members of the ASRC hosted site visits for members of the GAO, and will continue site visits for the remainder of their trip. These were an imperative part of their mission as members of the GAO witnessed firsthand the effects of climate change, and the solutions American Samoa has in place to mitigate the effects.

Sites for day 1 included seawall and coral restoration in Aua, behind Matafao Elementary Schools, and Faga'alu Watershed. According to MWR, Faga'alu Watershed is a relatively small watershed. Faga'alu's main threats that the villagers noticed were high sedimentation runoff from

the Quarry, trash and a decline in fisheries. As a solution, DMWR has held education outreaches, structural projects (e.g. sediment catch basins, rain gardens), trash management, identification and elimination of invasive trees, non-storm water discharge, animal waste management, public involvement, biological assessments and many more.

On Wednesday, January 18th, members of the GAO met with StarKist officials and witnessed the processes of cleaning, packaging, and exporting of tuna. GAO directors discussed Indo-Pacific Climate Change Risks with the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa Superintendent Atuatasi-Lelei Peau. Members of GAO then met with Co-Vice Chairmen EPA Director Fa’amao Asalele and MWR Director Taotasi Archie Soliai. To conclude the second day, the Chamber of Commerce, in collaboration with the American Samoa Government, Rotary Club and Lions Club, held a meeting at the ASCC Lecture Hall. GAO members had the opportunity to hear from the members of the private sector their experiences with climate change.

On Thursday, January 19th, GAO directors began their day meeting with the Department of Interior - Office of Insular Affairs Field Representative Lydia Nomura-Faleafine, followed by a visit to the Oyster Reef Project led by the Department of Commerce. After meeting with various local and federal officials, and visiting a plethora of projects managed by members of the ASRC, GAO directors concluded their visit to American Samoa with an exchange of gifts by the Office of the Governor.

GAO Director Latesha Love-Grayer stated, “We thank you all for your hospitality and making yourselves available throughout our visit, and we look forward to continuing to work with you all.” Members of the GAO arrived on Monday evening, January 16, 2023, and departed Thursday evening, January 19, 2023.













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