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Lieutenant Governor Talauega E.V. Ale Testifies at HR 6062 Legislative Hearing in Washington, DC



On Thursday January 18 2024, the Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs welcomed and expressed gratitude to Lt. Governor Talauega E. V. Ale who testified in a legislative hearing on HR 6062, a bill sponsored by Congresswoman Uifaatali Amata Radewagen. Lt. Governor Talauega appeared on behalf of Governor Lemanu P. S. Mauga. The proposed legislation would remove the Act of Congress requirement from the American

Samoa constitutional amendment process, reverting back to its former requirement whereby amendments are approved by the people of American Samoa via democratic majority rule and the Secretary of Interior.

Lt. Governor Talauega's statement opened with a firm reminder to the Subcommittee that American Samoa "is the only US territory that has to come to Congress and ask permission whenever our people want to amend our constitution".

Committee member questions to the Lt. Governor demonstrated a genuine interest in the constitutional amendment process in American Samoa, which is a source of political frustration expressed by the executive and legislative branches of government. Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-Arkansas) addressed the matter directly when he asked Lt. Governor Talauega if he believes "by removing Congressional oversight this process would be expedited". In response, Lt. Governor Talauega quipped that the current process burdens not only the people and leaders of American Samoa, but also members of Congress who have pressing issues to work on in Washington. The Lt. Governor's response drew positive feedback from committee members.

The current constitutional amendment process was put in place during the tenure of former Congressman Fofō I. Sunia in 1983. Congressman Fofō requested that the change be made at a time when the Territory's leadership questioned the decisions by the then Assistant Secretary of Interior.

Rep. Su'a Alexander Jennings was also present at the hearing and testified against the bill, sharing concerns that the bill would not guarantee the protection of rights of Swains Island Natives. Lt. Governor Talauega acknowledged the delegate from Swains Island in his statement and implored the committee members to value the political perspective from Afioga Su'a as it provides broader context to the constitutional issues facing American Samoa.

Lt. Governor Talauega also testified that one of the five constitutional amendments from the American Samoa Constitutional Convention in 2022 pending approval from Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland's review, gives the delegate from Swains Island the right to vote in the American Samoa House of Representatives. Afioga Su'a would be the first Swains Island delegate in the history of American Samoa to vote in the Legislature.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Interior for Insular and International Affairs Keone Nakoa was also present at the committee hearing and testified that the Department of Interior supports HR 6062.

The Lt. Governor was able to attend high-level meetings with White House Director of Puerto Rico and Territories Gretchen Sierra-Zorita and Department of Interior Office of Insular and

International Affairs leadership prior to the legislative hearing. Governor Lemanu and Lt. Governor Talauega continues to maintain close contact with Washington leaders who work directly with American Samoa's political and economic development issues.

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