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“Governor Testifies Before DOI Interagency Group on Insular Areas.”

“The Territories are in the President's heart and mind as we push forward with the Build Back Better Plan. Better means equity. So Territories will not be left behind in taking advantage of building back based on Reliability, Sustainability, and Resilience. President Biden wants to make sure you get the money, and to build more resilient territories.”

On February 1, 2022, Governor Lemanu delivered his testimony before the Interagency Group on Insular Areas (IGIA) during the 2022 Senior Plenary Session. The theme for this year's plenary session is "Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs and the Territories. The IGIA is a partnership between insular territories and federal counterparts, as called for under Executive Order 13537; the meeting brings together territorial Governors and Representatives to discuss issues of concern. The federal partners present included the White House, U.S. Department of Transportation, U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Department of Commerce.

The Honorable Julie Chavez Rodriquez, Director of The White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, stated that the goal of this discussion was to discuss the Territory's "meaningful outcomes" that will result from the support of the Build Back Better bill. She continued to recognize that the IGIA continues to be an essential platform for territories to prioritize and communicate issues directly to the White House and Federal partners. The Honorable Mitch Landrieu, White House Senior Advisor, and Infrastructure Coordinator, "The Territories are in the President's heart and mind as we push forward with the Build Back Better Plan. Better means equity. So Territories will not be left behind in taking advantage of building back based on Reliability, Sustainability, and Resilience. President Biden wants to make sure you get the money and to build more resilient territories." Mr. Landrieu continued, "The President wants us

to go fast, but not to hurry. Pressure test the system. Take the time to plan and strategize what works for you."

The Territories had voiced their opinions on Port Modernization, Broadband Infrastructure, Resilience Office. The common concern was that Territories need to be included in the definition of State when allocating and distributing funding. Governor Bryan of the Virgin Islands stated that "any U.S. Territory's infrastructure is an American infrastructure. As Americans, we need to be treated fairly and be acknowledged as such." Other Governors testified that Americans' expectations when visiting the territories are that they will enjoy the same types of roads as in the Mainland, so we need to make sure that expectation is met. They also discussed how the pandemic had affected their territories, local economies, tourism, and inflation.

In his testimony, Governor Lemanu discussed the highlights of American Samoa's response to dealing with the pandemic. "American Samoa created a safe travel bubble limiting inbound COVID cases and facilitated strategies to incorporate travel restrictions to and from the U.S. to two flights a month. Our COVID-19 vaccination efforts have reached more than 80 percent of our population and counting. We have implemented technology and policy to systematically take each passenger through a robust pretravel screening process we call TALOFAPass. And we continue to push through with our quarantine operations with the incoming flights to monitor and test passengers to minimize the risk of clusters or spread. It has been a roller coaster, but God has been good to us among the highs and the lows of 2021."

He continued to discuss how the Federal government's formula-based or matching funds guidelines are challenges for the territories. He stated, "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."

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