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Office of the Governor
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“Our Theme is Accountability.”

*Governor Lemanu sets April for Directors to begin planning the FY 2022 Budget.
Flag Day 2021 proposal to scale down celebrations.*

On Tuesday, March 9, 2021, Governor Lemanu and Lt. Governor Talauega held a cabinet meeting at the Department of Agriculture Conference Room. They discussed the success in managing COVID and strategies for rolling out further safeguards for our Territory and specific updates from various Departments.

“Remember our Country and its people. They placed us in these positions of leadership, and we need to make sure we take care of them and make their concerns a priority,” Governor Lemanu says in his opening statement. “We have had successes in managing COVID and have resources available to continue with this ongoing issue. We have access to COVID funding that we still need to utilize. As leaders, we need to find ways to put this funding to work; if we do not use it, we will lose it.” He continues, “Let’s focus on using the money within the scope of work and ensure we are doing it legally, but I want to make this a priority.”

Governor Lemanu also made it clear that the Administration should always be strategic in devising the best way to use Federal Government funds effectively and transparently as a collective. Funds not used may have to be handed back. “I encourage you to work closely with the Federal Government to help them understand our needs and how they can help. The vast majority of lawmakers in Washington have never been to American Samoa or know

anything about us. It is our job as leaders to help them understand who we are and our local issues.” said the Governor.

Another priority that the Governor mentioned since the beginning of this Administration is to make sure to, “Pay your workers, and pay them on time. Pay those who are serving our Territory tirelessly. This is very important to me and the Lt. Governor. If I cannot live off of my salary and military benefits, how can I expect someone working for \$12k-\$16k a year? Also, pay off our debts.”

He continues to challenge the Administration by giving Directors an April timeline to begin planning for the 2022 Budget submission and a strategic “spending plan” for all grant and COVID funding.

Governor Lemanu also pointed out the morning traffic in Nuuuli needs to be addressed and mentioned that a conducive solution would be for departments to decentralize their services away from the town area. The Governor stated, “If we spread some of our services and offices away from town and begin to place workers in some of these offices and closer to where they live, it will eliminate the traffic during rush hour.”

DHSS

The Director of Human and Social Services explained how the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program would start looking at processing food stamp benefits directly onto their cards. Currently, EBT cards are used primarily for WIC benefits. Director Suisala is hopeful that this program will help lighten foot traffic and large crowds around the main DHSS offices in Utulei.

FLAG DAY 2021

Secretary of Samoan Affairs PC Mauga presented to the Governor and Lt. Governor a scaled-down celebration for the 121st American Samoa Flag Day. The Office of Samoan Affairs has recommended a “celebration within policy constraints”, due to COVID-19 restrictions and repatriation efforts.

ROLLBACK UPDATES

The Department of Human Resources (DHR) reported on the current status of the ASG Rollback and the explanation of the revised pay scale. Director Pulou stated that the DHR has confidence in its training programs and procedures for handling each case. “There have been unauthorized pay raises since 2019,” said Governor Lemanu, “but the roll back process has been put in place to help right the ship.”

“If you have not seen the bigger picture yet, this has been the Governor’s priority since day zero, holding each other accountable for all our actions,” stated Lt. Governor Talauega, “our theme is accountability. Hold your workers to a higher standard of accountability, and remember that their performance is a reflection of your leadership.”

VACCINATION UPDATE

During a Department of Health (DOH) update on COVID-19 vaccination and testing, they reported nearly 47% of our total population are vaccinated. Dr. Aifili also stated that American Samoa ranks No. 1 in the US for vaccination rates per capita and ranks in the Top 5 worldwide. DOH and PORT had discovered a total of 6 positive COVID-19 cases on incoming vessels. DOH conducted appropriate actions and followed measures to isolate personnel and minimize contact with anyone onshore. These cases did not count towards American Samoa's list of positive cases. DOH has plans to extend vaccinations further out than the sentinel sites, as they introduce the "drive-thru" on March 13, 2021, and later hope to provide vaccinations out to the villages.

TSUNAMI WARNING AFTER ACTION

Director Samana focused on the breakdown of communication during last week's Tsunami warning event. "As you all know, Blue Sky and ASTCA were not able to manage the sheer volume of calls per minute that led to phone lines crashing during last week's event," mentioned Samana. "So we will be moving cabinet members that qualify as emergency first responders to the FirstNet Emergency Response phones. Each Director will receive a secondary NOAA radio as well. FirstNet will not be affected by the volume of regular calls that would generally flood and crash the phone networks."

Governor continued, "I want to personally recognize the Office of Samoan Affairs for getting out and reaching out to the Pulenu'u's to ring bells and warn residents to evacuate. This is the old way of doing things, and when phone lines and warning systems fail, we need to act on what we know. This FirstNet is great, but if that technology goes down, we can always rely on the Pulenu'u to get the word out." The Governor continued, "I also commend school children of Pago Pago, who did not wait for a Pulenu'u, but rang the bells themselves, alarming families to move further up and away from the shore. This should be an example of Lotonuu alive and well here in American Samoa."

OTHER TOPICS

Legal Counsel for the Governor spoke about the "rules reform program" that the Office of the Secretary of American Samoa will be carrying out. The project will require quite a bit of coordination with each Department's rules reform point of contact, with initial training to be expected soon.

The Territorial Audit Office also presented that they are continuing their responsibility to carry out audits of every Department, Office, and Agency.