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Governor Lemanu Addresses Fono at the Opening of the Fourth Regular Session of the 37th Legislature

"I want to commend the Fono for its strong partnership and the working relationship we have fostered since the onset of the administration. Lieutenant Governor Talauega and I look forward to leaning on your wisdom and support for the social, political, and economic future of our Territory."



Pictured above (L-R) Chief Justice The Honorable Lealaialoa Fritz Michael Kruse, Speaker of the House The Honorable Rep. Savali Talavou Ale, Governor of American Samoa The Honorable Lemanu P.S. Mauga, and President of the Senate The Honorable Sen. Tuaolo M.E. Fruean

On Monday, July 11, 2022, at the Rex Lee Auditorium in Utulei, Honorable Governor Lemanu P. S. Mauga gave remarks at the opening ceremony of the Fourth Regular Session of the 37th Legislature.

Governor Lemanu's overall remarks included ASG Financial Update, Fiscal Year 2023, Retirement Fund, COVID-19 Response, a special recognition of a citizen, Substance Abuse & Mental Health, ANZ Departure, Climate Change and Land Purchases, and Upcoming Events and Projects.

Following traditional salutations, Governor Lemanu provided the following remarks:

ASG Financial Update

"The Fiscal Year 2021 Audit is complete and we have recorded a surplus of \$7.4 million. We await legislation to redirect the spending of this surplus. Preliminary revenues collected as of June 2022 reflects \$92,404,365.43 with our expenditures at \$78,076,072.03 respectively. We also foresee a surplus at the end of FY 2022.

Fiscal Year 2023

The Fiscal Year 2023 budget has been prepared for this session. The total fiscal year final budget proposal is capped at \$693,415,435, reflecting an increase of \$140,630,435 or 25% the prior fiscal year. The overall total increase is attributed to the significant surge in federal grants due to COVID-19. The American Samoa Government is responsible for the financing of approximately 49% of its planned expenditures with local funds while our federal grants will absorb 51.1%, the remaining budget. The projection is a conservative estimate consistent with the expected revenue trends.

The overall increase for Fiscal Year 2023 will support our Territory's Education, Public Safety, Economic Development, Youth Population, Elderly Population, Public Health, Infrastructure improvement, Sea Wall protection projects, Climate Change, Transportation, Drinking Water, Solid Wastes, Technology Advancement, and many others.

Retirement Fund

I want to thank the Fono for their support in passing Public Law 37-10 to increase government and member contribution to the Retirement Fund. It has been a continuous concern regarding their reported shortfalls in the past fiscal years. An increase to the contribution will help secure compensation for the future of the employees of American Samoa.

COVID-19 Emergency Response

There have been many changes since the arrival of the COVID-19 Disease in American Samoa: Changes to our daily activities, family and social gatherings, church activities, traveling abroad,

hospital visits, schools, businesses and services, and our whole way of life has been uprooted. We have also grieved the loss of over 32 family members in our community due to COVID-19. In the near future, I wish to dedicate a day of commemoration for their lives.

The arrival of our federal partners, under the direction of the Lieutenant Governor as the GAR and the COVID-19 Task Force supplied much needed manpower and technical assistance at the LBJ hospital. In coordination with DOH in partnership with the Office of Samoan Affairs, the response efforts reached out to the villages efficiently. This included care package deliveries, vouchers for food, ramping up vaccination efforts, test-to-treat sites, drive throughs, and pop-up sites. The overall goal was to support, monitor, and treat infected residents effectively.

I thank our people for your support towards the restrictions during the surge. Although we have relaxed many of our restrictions, we must continue to protect ourselves from the COVID-19 virus by continuing to enforce the mitigation measures of social distancing and masking up.

Special Recognition

On my return flight last week July 4, 2022, there was an emergency situation with one of the passengers. I noticed the Hawaiian Airlines crew were busy in the aisle. An announcement came through on the intercom that there was a need for a doctor or nurse on the flight. They were assiduous with the passenger up until the flight landed.

I seeked out a report of what had occurred on the flight the following morning, and they explained that a passenger was experiencing chest pains and shortness of breath during the flight. He became unconscious and when the crew paged for a doctor or nurse, a passenger named Denise Allen offered to help when no one answered. She applied CPR and together with the HAL crew, the man regained consciousness.

Today, I recognize Denise Allen for her bravery and her service. Denise Allen is a nursing student attending American Samoa Community College and is currently employed at the LBJ Medical Center. I also wish to recognize the crew of the Hawaiian Airlines for their quick response attributing to saving this passenger's life: Apati Tua Kealoha, Debra Phillips, Kuata Ofoia. We are here with Station Manager Tuli Fruean, and wish to express our gratitude to Hawaiian Airlines for their service to the people of American Samoa.

Substance Abuse & Mental Health

The pandemic has highlighted the adverse impacts on mental health and the increase in substance abuse across the Nation to include American Samoa. This administration recognizes this troubling reality among the youth and families, and is committed to addressing these issues immediately. We believe that the most effective solutions involve the community as a whole - from churches, villages, schools, and in our homes.

We have established the Comprehensive Substance Abuse Council (CSAC) composed of government, private, and at large community members with a focus on education & outreach,

enforcement & investigation, and treatment & rehabilitation. The first convening of the CSAC will be held July 12th, 2022 and leaders are invited to participate in this opening and important preliminary work.

ANZ Departure

As you are aware, ANZ Amerika Samoa Bank will be ceasing operations in the territory by the end of September 2022. I have chosen not to ask ANZ Guam to extend its stay. It's important to note that ANZ is not just leaving American Samoa; it is leaving the retail banking market in the U.S. entirely. This will leave American Samoa with only one Bank Institution, Territorial Bank of American Samoa.

Climate Change and Land Purchase

The threat of climate change can be seen in the shores, erosion of our seawalls and our roads, rising sea levels, and our drinking water. Our policies and actions must reinforce our resiliency efforts today and for the future. Hopefully, we'll be able to assist Olohenga in the future.

We are exploring all options to provide immediate relief and long-term solutions to the challenges we face. This administration has begun improvement projects for seawalls in Tutuila, Manu'a, and Aunu'u. We have plans for lands behind the mountains, we seek reservoirs, and roadways to reach the other side of the islands. I personally thank his Afioga Ma'opu Fano for giving way through lands to the government to begin work towards the mountainside. Other plans include diverting the traffic in Nu'uuli and Tafuna, and better access to medical care, etc.

Recently, communications have not been thoroughly disclosed in regards to recent land purchases beyond the mountains, and I extend our sincerest apologies to the villages involved. Our intentions are clear and for the benefit of our people as I have mentioned previously, however, I apologize for the confusion.

It is with the same intentions that we have purchased land in Hawaii, it is an investment in the future needs of our people outside of our Territory.

Upcoming Events and Projects

Other events happening soon are the opening of the Ofu/Olosega Airport, Manu'a Cession Day, Samoan Heritage Week in Hawaii, Constitutional Convention, Election, and the upcoming Holidays towards the end of the year.

Closing

In closing, I want to acknowledge the hard work of ASG and the Private Sector that are repairing and improving our infrastructure daily: the improved road conditions, sea wall protection projects, and upgrading recreational areas. Thank you for your hard work and your partnership.

As we experience reopening our air and sea ports, American Samoa is awaiting the Post COVID-19 travel boom. The territory must be prepared and ensure we have the capacity to host the influx of travelers, ensure all travelers follow local safety protocols, and are ready for a possible surge in COVID-19 cases.

The upcoming Constitutional Convention is a highly anticipated event. It presents a grand opportunity to exercise our right as citizens to help reinforce our political framework. I ask our people, members of the communities and our village councils to come together and initiate discussion with our assembly of delegates for constitutional changes necessary to propel our Territory forward and secure our place as a US entity and a Pacific nation.

Lastly, I want to commend the Fono for its strong partnership and the working relationship we have fostered since the onset of the administration. The advancement of our Territory and the prosperity of our people have been entrusted to us, elected leaders. The Lieutenant Governor and I look forward to leaning on you all for your wisdom and perspective on the social, political, and economic future of our Territory.

God bless the Legislature during this regular session, the Government and people of American Samoa.”

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Beauty Porotesano-Ale and Fiapa'ipa'i Fruean.



Lieutenant Governor Talauega E. V. Ale and Marian McGuire-Ale pictured here with First Lady Ella Mauga.