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Governor Lemanu attends the Interagency Group on Insular Areas 2023 Senior Plenary Session in Washington, D.C.

“There’s nothing we can do if we don’t work together”

-President Joe Biden



The Interagency Group on Insular Areas (IGIA) 2023 Senior Plenary Session was held in Washington D.C. at the Department of Interior’s (DOI) Headquarters on February 8, 2023. The IGIA brings together elected leaders of the U.S. Insular Areas of American Samoa, Guam, the United States Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) to discuss issues facing the territories and explore resources to resolve the needs of each territory. Governor Lemanu, First Lady Ella Mauga, Congresswoman Uifa’atali Amata, and several directors attended the IGIA session.

The Secretary of Interior, Deb Haaland opened the session by thanking the leaders of the territories for voicing their concerns and working with their office to resolve these issues. She reassured her support for each territory and their concerns. Each of the elected leaders was given 5 minutes to present their issues. Governor Lemanu opened his remarks by thanking the President and the DOI leadership for leading the efforts to waive the local match requirement for usage of Federal grants. He pleaded with the other federal agencies to follow suit and allow the territories to fully utilize and realize the benefits of federal funding allocated to the territories. Governor Lemanu quoted President Joe Biden from his State of the Union the day before, “There’s nothing that we can do if we don’t work together”. Governor Lemanu highlighted the danger American Samoa is in with the impact of Climate Change. He referenced the U.S. Geology stating that “American Samoa is vulnerable to sea-level rise in part due to the steep terrain or its islands (USGS)”. “I don’t want to see my Island sink”, stated Governor Lemanu. He firmly asked for immediate attention and support on this issue affecting the territory of American Samoa. Governor Lemanu moved on to talk about the approved Constitutional Amendments by the people of American Samoa. He shared that although American Samoa’s relationship with the U.S. is defined as unincorporated, “the state of democracy in the government is strong”. Governor Lemanu thanked Secretary Deb Haaland for meeting with the American Samoa team on February 7, 2023 and most importantly to honor the voice of the people of American Samoa. He continued to thank the US Federal government and its multiple agencies for their continuous support for the people of American Samoa. Governor Lemanu asked for an increase in funding because of the hike in the cost of living, especially with the materials needed for infrastructure projects. He discussed the Buy America Act and how it makes it difficult for American Samoa to explore other options that are within the cost range of the awarded grant. Governor Lemanu emphasized that when there is a full cycle for hard infrastructure, soft infrastructure, and critical infrastructure. He gave the example of building a home. The frame of the house is the hard infrastructure. The electricity, furniture, and appliances are soft infrastructure. The bathroom is a critical infrastructure. “One compliments the other. We cannot build roads without hospitals. We cannot have hospitals without schools. If we miss one, we will not be doing any service to our people” added Governor Lemanu. This is Governor Lemanu’s third IGIA meeting and he shared that it is important to understand the needs of our people. Communication needs to be consistent so the territories can learn from each other. Governor Lemanu recommended rotating the IGIA meetings to different Islands so the people can see their nation leaders. In addition, the leaders will have exposure to the issues discussed in the IGIA meetings.

Congresswoman Uifa’atali Amata supported and aligned her goals with Governor Lemanu’s priorities.

The Departments of Interior, Transportation, Energy, Agriculture, Commerce and Federal Communications Commission, and the Environmental Protection Agency presented at the IGIA and conducted a Q&A session for the leaders of the territories. The assistant secretary for insular and international affairs, Carmen Cantor concluded the meeting by reminding the leaders and

delegates that IGIA is a great opportunity to voice their concerns and make recommendations for the establishment or implementation of Federal programs concerning the territories. The DOI is committed to working together with the territories on the available resources that will help to assist with project improvements in the territories.

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