



Opening Statement
Hearing on Impacts of COVID-19 on the U.S. Territories
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
June 30, 2020

Good afternoon to everyone, the Committee will come to order. It is good to be able to welcome you all this afternoon, although Congresswoman Radewagen I think it's probably your good morning, there. So we will just say good day to everyone. who is joining us from American Samoa.

As folks may know, we've had a whole series of hearings on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over the past several weeks. We've looked at the impact on the energy sector, on mineral supply chains, on wildfire preparedness.

But, today we're going to take a closer look at the virus' impact on the territories; at the implementation of existing law aimed at mitigating and preventing its spread; and at potential legislation that could benefit the territories in the future.

All of our states face challenges in fighting the spread and the impact of COVID-19. But, I think it's fair to say that the territories face additional hurdles. You've got limited capacity to handle a health pandemic, to economies with fewer sources of revenue that are severely harmed by the economic shutdown, particularly those that are dependent upon tourism. And, that's where I can certainly relate to USVI, to Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, CNMI, these are all areas that see flux of folks with tourism.

Although the territories have limited ports of entry for the virus to arrive at their islands, the reality is that the virus spread well before travel restrictions were in place, and of course once it's on an island it is difficult to contain. American Samoa is the only jurisdiction to keep the virus from reaching their shores, and while we certainly hope that remains the case, we don't take anything for granted now days.

Congress has passed four funding bills to address the COVID-19 outbreak, and while I know these bills do not contain everything that everyone wanted to have included, we did seek to make sure that the measures work for the territories where federal programs are not necessarily implemented in the same manner as the states.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act increased Medicaid funding for the territories and lowered the territories' Medicaid match rate. It provided additional SNAP funding and

supplemental funding for those territories that utilize block grant funding instead of the traditional SNAP.

The CARES Act included language to allow all territories to participate in the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, regardless of whether they have unemployment insurance programs. In addition to financial assistance for governments through the Coronavirus Relief Fund, it included an additional \$55 million through [Department of the Interior's] Office of Insular Affairs for COVID-19 needs.

I think we're probably going to hear this afternoon that more is needed. And, know that we will be working on that as we head into July and this next work period coming up. My hope is that today's hearing will provide us with a better understanding of what has worked so far, what needs to be adjusted, and what additional measures should be considered. So, I'm pleased that we have all five representatives of the territories that are with us here today to lead this discussion.

So before I introduce witnesses, I will turn to Ranking Member Manchin for his remarks and comments this morning.

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