



**Opening Statement
Hearing on the State of the Territories
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
February 26, 2019**

Good morning and welcome, everyone. The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources will come to order.

I like to begin by welcoming and thanking each of the Governors for being with us this morning. I know that certainly for some of you this is quite a trek, actually for all of you, and so it's greatly, greatly appreciated. It is difficult enough to find time on one Governor's schedule for a meeting, let alone getting four of you together here, so I am especially grateful and appreciative that you are here. Unfortunately Governor Moliga from American Samoa was unable to make it to Washington D.C. today, so he is not with us in person, but, we do have his written testimony which will be part of the record.

The purpose this morning is to hear about your priorities for your respective territories for the coming year and how our Committee can be helpful in achieving them.

I had the privilege just last year of visiting four of the territories as Chairman of this Committee, including a trip last February to Guam, Tinian, and Saipan – very, very impactful certainly for me and my first visit out there. I've had the opportunity to be in Puerto Rico and the USVI shortly after the devastating hurricanes the year prior. I think it's fair to say that Congress doesn't always acknowledge the contributions that the territories make to our nation. But from high participation rates in our Armed Forces, the distinct culture of the islands, and their geographical importance, the territories are clearly an integral part of the United States.

I would note that each of the territories has had at least one major disaster declared by the President in the past two years. Of course, we're all very familiar with the impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. We've had much discussion here in this Committee about that, but we're also aware of Cyclone Gita, Typhoon Mangkhut, and most recently Super Typhoon Yutu, which directly struck the Northern Mariana island of Tinian with sustained winds of 178 miles per hour and gusts over 200 miles per hour. I heard back from many friends and Alaskans of the damage that Tinian had sustained, and in Saipan as well.

NOAA says that Super Typhoon Yutu was the second strongest storm to ever hit any part of the United States. So I would anticipate that we might hear a bit today about the role of the federal government in responding to these disasters, including what has worked and what can be improved.

Of course, disaster relief is not the only area of concern. From workforce issues to healthcare and tax treatment, there is plenty to talk about this morning. And a new issue arose a few weeks ago when a three-judge panel of the First Circuit Court of Appeals determined that the manner in which the members

of the Financial Oversight and Management Board, established by PROMESA, were appointed is unconstitutional.

While narrow in its ruling – that the Board members are principal officers of the United States and subject to the Senate’s advice and consent – the panel’s finding on congressional authority under the Territorial Clause could have broader consequences down the road if left to stand. We are still reviewing this here on the Committee and could possibly take up in the future.

Again, thank you all for being here and for your leadership in your respective areas. I will now turn to my colleague and Ranking Member, Senator Manchin.

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