

# **Chairman Senator Joe Manchin's Opening Statement**

**Thursday, February 10, 2022**

## **Full Committee Hearing on the U.S. Territories**

- The committee will come to order.
- Good afternoon everyone. Thank you all for being here today, both in person and virtually, to discuss the current state of the U.S. territories.
- I would first like to extend a warm welcome to our territorial governors.
- For those of you that have joined us in person, I want to thank you for traveling great distances from your homes to be here. And for Governor Mauga who has joined us online, I know it is quite early where you are in American Samoa, so thank you joining us this morning.
- And speaking of time zones from around the world, I'd like to remind my colleagues that the sun never sets on the jurisdiction of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.
- This committee has a long-standing history covering territorial policy, and I look forward to discussing the challenges and priorities for your respective territories and how the Committee can help advance your goals.
- The territories make valuable contributions to our nation, and I want to recognize that each territory is an integral part of the United States.
- We know our territories share similar issues, but I understand that each island is unique and each territory faces a different set of circumstances.

- My goal for this hearing is to discuss the broad issues, as well as the ones you face individually, so we can support each of you in advancing the well-being of those living and working on your respective islands.

## **COVID-19**

- COVID-19 has had a profound impact on our lives and has certainly brought challenges to ensuring the health and safety of our communities.
- The pandemic's challenges were compounded in the territories given the ongoing recovery from the devastating natural disasters that have impacted the islands.
- In June 2020, while still early in the pandemic, this Committee held a hearing focused on the impact of COVID-19 and the response in the territories.
- I applaud each government for quickly and effectively responding to the pandemic and for a successful vaccine rollout.
- I know that the decisions you have made are difficult when considering how they impact your tourism reliant economies.
- In response to the pandemic, Congress passed a number of funding bills to provide relief from the impacts of COVID-19.
- In passing these pieces of legislation, we made sure the funding provisions would work for the territories, especially for programs where implementation differs from the states.

## **Additional Topics**

- Along with the economic challenges, the pandemic also exposed the disparities in our healthcare system, which include limited and unequal healthcare access, aging facilities, and shortages in medical providers.

- As a former governor of a rural state, I certainly understand these challenges.
- I also know there are questions about Medicaid. As you know well, Medicaid funding in the territories is capped and the federal match is fixed at a lower rate than most of our states and DC.
- While Congress temporarily increased Medicaid funding to the territories amid the pandemic, the additional funding has expired. We need to figure out a long-term solution to ensure everyone continues to have access to essential health services.
- Of course, the pandemic and health care are not the only areas of concern. There are many, many pressing issues we will discuss today, from workforce issues and disaster recovery to the different treatment of taxes and federal assistance programs.
- I look forward to learning more from the Governors about these issues facing each of these island communities.
- I am hopeful that we can work together to create and respond to the challenges facing the territories and find commonsense solutions that will continue to lay the foundation for strong, sustainable economic growth for many years to come.

## **Conclusion**

- Again, I'd like to thank each of you for your time today. As a former Governor myself, I know the many demands on your time.
- I look forward to a productive conversation regarding your priorities, and how Congress can help facilitate the success of your endeavors.
- With that, I will turn to Senator Barrasso for his opening remarks.