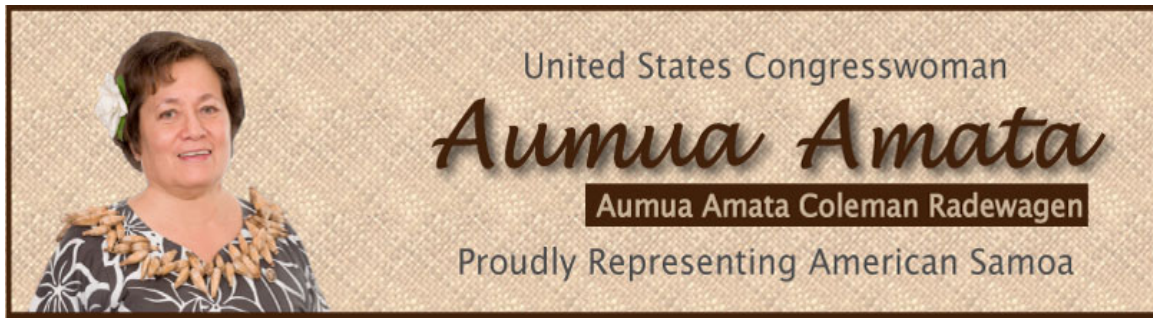




### **Chairman Amata's Opening Statement**

"Talofa lava and good morning. There is no more fitting way for me to begin this proceeding than to express my heartfelt gratitude to Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Grijalva for entrusting this mission to me as Chair, and to my esteemed Pacific Island colleague from CNMI, the Honorable Kilili Sablan, as Co-Chair. By doing so, they have empowered the people of the Pacific Islands whose past and future under the American flag comes first in our minds and our hearts.

Our duty is to better enable the House Natural Resource Committee, and Congress to determine how best to protect American values and interests in the Pacific. Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Grijalva, with the help of the distinguished members of this Task Force, we won't let you down.

The Pacific region is critical for U.S. interests and security. The U.S. has a vested interest in and duty to protect U.S. homeland territories like my home, American Samoa, and the Freely Associated States from rising influence from the People's Republic of China. The Compacts of Free Association are vital to that endeavor and the broader U.S.-China competition.

My work on this enterprise is informed by my participation in the September 2022 Pacific Island Leaders Conference in Honolulu with heads of state from the PIF nations, including the FAS and chief executives from the U.S. territories. I also participated in the first ever U.S.-Pacific Islands Country summit held in Washington D.C.

I approach this task force with a keen recollection of my participation in the U.S.-Pacific Islands Summit Declaration that affirmed that COFA is a high priority and one of the "cornerstones of U.S.-Pacific cooperation."

As we gather now for this Task Force hearing, we must continue to show our commitment to the region and our resolve the challenges and respond to any threat posed by the PRC. We will do this in a manner that meets U.S. interests and supports Pacific Island communities in our territories and the FAS.

The Indo-Pacific Task Force will enable Congress to rise to this challenge.

The Administration must work with the leadership of this Committee and Congress to ensure that we have what we need to enact a COFA agreement that is fair and just, reasonable and responsible, and protects U.S. interests in the Pacific.

This isn't just about U.S. interests, but also that of the people who live in the FAS. The COFA agreements are a symbol of democracy, good governance, transparency, and the rule

of law. We have seen, in the FAS, that the PRC is the antithesis of those values – we just need to look at President Panuelo’s letter of PRC activities in the FSM.

I want to welcome all the Members who sit on this Task Force as we address the issues affecting the U.S. in the Pacific. We all come from a broad and diverse background, a key American strength. Through this diversity, we will deliver for the American people as we shepherd the COFA agreements through Congress and address the issues and challenges the U.S. faces in the Pacific.

We do this, not just for this generation but generations to follow.

There is a lot that needs to be done and so I look forward to getting to work and hearing from our witnesses today.”

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