

Statement of  
The Hon. Donna M. Christensen  
Oversight Hearing on the Impact of the Minimum Wage Increase in American Samoa  
February 22, 2008

I am pleased to be here in American Samoa to convene this Oversight hearing of the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs to look into the impact of the increase in the American Samoa minimum wage on the people and economy of your islands.

When we reconstituted the Subcommittee at the start of the 110th Congress, we pledged to take the subcommittee to the people it serves. As a result, we held hearings last year, on the island of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands as well as my own U.S. Virgin Islands. And today, we are honoring our pledge to your Congressman, the Honorable Eni Faleomavaega to travel to your beautiful islands to hold a hearing as well.

As you know, when Congress sought to raise the federal minimum wage for the first time in many years, we were not looking to raise the American Samoa minimum wage. While it was true that there was focus on raising the minimum wage in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa got caught in mainland politics having nothing to do with the underlying factors that would suggest the efficacy of increasing the minimum wage in American Samoa.

And so here we are to assess the impact of an increase in the minimum wage of American Samoa which we did not seek and actively sought to block. In the end we were only able to come away with incremental increases and a requirement that the U.S. Department of Labor report to Congress on the findings of a study assessing and projecting the impacts of the increases in the minimum wage; which in its initial report, which was recently issued, points out that the mandated minimum wage increase in American Samoa is “unsustainable”.

So we are here to listen to you the leaders and representatives of the people of American Samoa on how our well intended attempt to increase the wages paid to American Samoa workers is working or not working if that’s the case. While I support the opportunity for all workers to earn more, I am constrained as a physician, by the physician creed to not do any harm.

And so I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses here today to educate us on whether the actions we took is indeed not doing any harm. It is often the case when legislation is passed in Washington to cover the fifty states, little thought if any is generally given to the impact that such legislation will have on the Insular Areas. That is why I am pleased to be here As the

Chair of the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs to give thought to and assess the impact of this law on American Samoa.

Thank you again for your warm welcome. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses.