

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DONNA M. CHRISTENSEN
CHAIRWOMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES
OF THE INTERAGENCY GROUP ON INSULAR AREAS
July 17, 2008**

This afternoon the Subcommittee is meeting to hear from witnesses representing some of our U.S. insular areas, as well as officials from the Department of the Interior and the former Clinton Administration. The subject of our attention is the Interagency Group on Insular Areas

As many of us here know, travelling to DC from the islands involves great preparation in both time and resources. The Subcommittee had hoped to have the participation of the Governors of Guam, Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands by “piggybacking” on the National Governors Association summer session held in Pennsylvania earlier this week. Due to prior commitments, the majority of Governors were not even able to attend the NGA session or this hearing. However, written testimony has been submitted to the Subcommittee in lieu of their absence and it will be entered into the record accordingly.

I will leave it to our witnesses to provide the Subcommittee a more in depth accounting and history of the IGIA in their testimony. However as brief background, the IGIA is an outgrowth of efforts taken by my predecessor - Insular Subcommittee Chairman Ron de Lugo. Chairman de Lugo, along with Senator Bennet Johnston, both recognized the existence of a policy gap in the way the Federal Government interacted with U.S. Insular Areas. Chairman de Lugo and Senator Johnston, who chaired the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, introduced similar measures to bridge this gap in the 103rd Congress.

Chairman de Lugo's legislation would have established a Council on Insular Affairs, comprised on policy level officials from all Federal agencies, chaired by the President's chief domestic and foreign policy advisors, and assisted by a staff in the President's Executive Office.

The IGIA was born out of this legislation and the continuing dialogue and compromise between Congress, the Department of the Interior, and the White House.

The IGIA, as originally established under President Clinton and reconstituted in 2003 by President Bush is nearing its tenth year anniversary as a working group. The Department of the Interior holds at least an annual meeting which coincides with Governors travelling to DC in February.

As it has seasoned, the IGIA has proven to be a regular activity of the Department of the Interior with occasional success.

The Subcommittee looks forward to the testimony being offered this afternoon and hopes that the interaction we have with our witnesses will assist in strengthening the efforts of the IGIA to address the very unique challenges faced by US insular areas.