



OFFICE OF INSULAR AFFAIRS

**U.S. Department
of the Interior**

www.doi.gov/oia
News Release

Date: February 24, 2015

Contact: Jessica Kershaw, interior_press@ios.doi.gov

Tanya Harris Joshua (OIA) 202-208-6008

tanya_joshua@ios.doi.gov

**Secretary Jewell Co-Hosts Annual Meeting of Interagency
Group on Insular Areas**

*Climate Change, Workforce Development, Tourism and Compact Impact Aid Top
Agenda Items Discussed*

Washington, D.C. – Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Esther Kia’aina today joined Governors and Congressional representatives from each of the U.S. Insular Areas at their annual meeting of the Interagency Group on Insular Affairs (IGIA) at the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Co-hosted by Secretary Jewell and White House Intergovernmental Affairs Director Jerry Abramson, this year’s session focused on major issues of importance to the territories, including climate change adaptation, workforce development, tourism, and compact impact aid – federal assistance provided as a result of the impact on U.S. jurisdictions by migration from Micronesian nations allied to the United States under Compacts of Free Association. More than 100 participants, including policy-level representatives from federal agencies with program responsibilities in the U.S. Insular Areas, discussed issues and considered interagency collaboration to address these concerns. U.S. Senator Mazie Hirono was also present at the IGIA and spoke about her concerns regarding compact impact.

Video interviews of insular leaders participating in the IGIA are available for downloading and free use by island news media at <http://ge.tt/6nZfH6B2/v/0?c>.

“From forums like the IGIA, to federal assistance and economic development programs, Interior is dedicated to working with our fellow Americans living in American Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands,” said Secretary Jewell. “President Obama and his Administration are committed to helping island leaders build strong,

dynamic and resilient communities, especially as we address the impacts of climate change, which the islands are already experiencing.”

“The IGIA is the largest annual gathering of federal and island officials here in D.C. that seeks to elevate priority and collective issues of the U.S. territories to the highest levels within our federal government,” said Assistant Secretary Kia’aina. “Moving forward, IGIA will not only be an annual event, but a continuing dialogue among the White House, the Department of the Interior, and other relevant federal agencies on the issues identified prior to and during today’s meeting.”

The Insular Areas were well represented by their leadership which included U.S. Virgin Islands Governor Kenneth Mapp; U.S. Virgin Islands Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett; American Samoa Governor Lolo Moliga; American Samoa Congresswoman Amata Coleman Radewagen; Governor of Guam Eddie Calvo; Guam Congresswoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo; and Lt. Governor of the Northern Marianas Ralph Torres on behalf of Governor Eloy Inos. The island governors were also in Washington to attend the annual National Governors Association Conference, and the Western Governors Association Meeting.

This was the fifth meeting of the IGIA since President Obama reestablished the group in 2010 with the White House as Co-Chair to address policies for the U.S. insular territories. Among its duties, the IGIA solicits information from the island governors and other elected officials, develops recommendations to address issues of concern, and advises the President on establishing, modifying and implementing federal policies that advance insular area issues. The work of the IGIA builds on and coordinates interagency collaboration and efforts spearheaded by the Department of the Interior, through its Office of Insular Affairs.

The archived webcast of the IGIA Plenary Session is available at:

<http://new.livestream.com/usinterior/events/3824237>

All statements and presentations submitted for the IGIA will be compiled and uploaded to the OIA website in the near future. This year’s panel topics and panelists included:

Climate Change

- Governor Lolo Matalasi Moliga, American Samoa
- Stanton Enomoto, Climate Change Cultural Adaptation Coordinator, National Park Service, and Staff to the Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative, U.S. Department of the Interior
- Doug Beard, Acting Associate Director, Climate and Land Use Change, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior
- Dr. Howard Diamond, Director, World Data Center at NOAA's National Center for Environmental Information, U.S. Department of Commerce

American Samoa Governor Lolo Moliga thanked Assistant Secretary Kia’aina for recent renewable energy projects funded in the territory and stated that he looks forward to working with the Office of Insular Affairs for climate adaptation plans. Assistant Secretary Kia’aina announced that a Climate Change Coordinator will be hired in the Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) by April. She also announced that OIA will be coordinating with Guam Governor Calvo

to host a two-day stakeholder meeting on Guam, in June, between territorial leaders and federal agencies on Climate Change resilience and adaptation.

Workforce Development in the Territories

- Lt. Governor Ralph Deleon Guerrero Torres, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
- Byron Zuidema, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor
- John Conger, Performing the Duties of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations and the Environment, U.S. Department of Defense
- Rear Admiral Kerry Nessler, Director of the Office of Global Health Affairs, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Mariela Melero, Associate Director, Customer Service and Public Engagement, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Workforce development is critical to the territories given their island economies, reliance on tourism, and remoteness. Lt. Governor Ralph Torres of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) expressed concern about the need for increased immigration given that the current workforce in his territory will not be sufficient to replace foreign employees that must leave the CNMI by the end of 2019, under current law. Federal partners invited territorial leaders to participate in working with them on implementation of the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act. The Assistant Secretary stated that, in concert with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, workforce development in the health profession will be prioritized for the territories.

Tourism – Discussion on Barriers to Development for the Territories

- Governor Kenneth E. Mapp, U.S. Virgin Islands
- Brandon Belford, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs, U.S. Department of Transportation
- Daniel Tanciar, Director, Travel and Tourism Initiatives, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

USVI Governor Kenneth Mapp highlighted infrastructure as one of the greatest needs with regard to strengthening tourism prospects and building island economies. Suggestions were made that federal partners revisit formula grants with respect to infrastructure as well as federal policies adversely impacting air and ocean transportation. Federal partners welcomed further dialogue with territorial leaders on transportation and security issues related to tourism development.

Compact Impact Aid

- Governor Eddie Baza Calvo, Guam
- U.S. Senator Mazie Hirono, Hawaii
- Paul Dioguardi, Director of Intergovernmental and External Affairs, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

The U.S. territories of Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the State of Hawaii remain greatly impacted by migration of citizens from the Freely Associated States of Micronesia, the Marshalls, and Palau. Guam Governor Calvo shared his concerns and expressed appreciation for the support from Secretary Sally Jewell, Assistant Secretary Esther Kia'aina, U.S. Senator Mazie Hirono, and Congresswoman Madeleine Bordallo in advocating for additional funds. All agreed that short of increasing the statutory cap for compact impact aid funding from its current \$30 million, other alternative or innovative ways of ameliorating compact impact on affected jurisdictions should be explored by the Executive Branch and Congress.

###

The Department of the Interior is responsible for coordinating federal policy with respect to the territories of American Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and administering and overseeing U.S. federal assistance provided to the Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau under the Compacts of Free Association. The Office of Insular Affairs mission is to foster economic opportunities, promote government efficiency, and improve the quality of life for the people of the insular areas.