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As prepared address of U.S. Chargé d’Affaires in Samoa, Robin L. Yeager, delivered to the Samoa Association of Women Graduates on Wednesday, March 18.

Introduction: I know Samoans have a lot of interest in the global financial situation, how other nations are reacting, and what the impact may be on Samoa. Many sectors are involved in studying the current situation here, and a big brainstorming session is planned in a little over a week. I hope today’s topic will be timely. I’d like to thank the organization for inviting me today, and for suggesting such a stimulating, and for me, challenging, topic. It’s a pleasure to be with an organization that comes together to celebrate education, and to find ways to support the educational dreams of young people. It’s clear you know the meaning of the term investment.

Stimulating Hope: Barack Obama’s Financial Plan

President Barack Obama’s financial plan consists of an annual budget and an economic stimulus package. Together they include plans for handling trade and taxes and for correcting weaknesses in the credit sector. They deal with regulation of the financial system, and each includes provisions for accountability, oversight and transparency. Google.gov and

Recovery.gov are two Websites specifically dedicated to helping citizens know what their government is doing, and to tracking each dollar that is spent. Together, the budget and stimulus plan put into numbers and concrete programs the philosophy of the administration—that hard work and smart choices can not only turn around the current financial situation, but produce a country with improved infrastructure, better poised to meet environmental challenges, and with a stronger, sounder economy.

This administration took office at a time of great financial stress, with citizens questioning the reliability of the nation's financial structures, and the wisdom of established policies. Citizens are personally worried about their jobs, their savings and financial investments, they wonder about their ability to plan for the future, to educate their children, to plan for retirement. People who had felt secure are suddenly worried about the impact an illness or loss of job might have. Families who had purchased a home have now seen its value evaporate, many losing the home they've invested in for years. And this is the middle class. Others, who were less established, or already felt vulnerable, see their own grim situation getting worse. In a country often marked by the spirit of optimism, people are worried. It's not mere coincidence that the word depression describes both an emotional, psychological condition, and an economic phase. As the economy slows down, people lose hope. Stimulating both will be a big job.

The budget was presented in late February. It lays out a plan for the work of the government for the next year. It helps to establish program and policy priorities, expand some of the government's roles, and decrease others. As President Obama said, the budget isn't just numbers on a page. It establishes our plans and priorities as we confront some of the toughest challenges the country has ever faced. With this budget, President Obama is asking Washington

to look beyond the next election and take a long-term step to ensure the nation's future strength and prosperity. The budget calls for sacrifices and difficult decisions. But it strives to boldly invest in three key areas critical to the nation's economic future: energy, health care, and education.

Investing in a clean energy future will put the U.S. in the forefront of an increasingly important and vital industry in the 21st century, and create the jobs that will form a new foundation for the middle class. Investing in an expanded energy sector will be investing in our environment, in our national security, and in our economy. It will produce skills, technology and equipment that will result in new growth areas for export. And it will improve the quality of our own environment and the health of the planet. Clean energy projects will include wind turbines, solar cells and increased efficiency in the production and delivery of energy.

When the threat of an illness means financial ruin for an individual or family, and when trying to provide care for employees bankrupts a company, everyone suffers. By improving the cost and availability of quality medical care, both families and business will benefit.

Reforming and strengthening the education system across the United States will ensure innovation and competitiveness into the next century, and support our efforts in other key areas, such as energy and health.

The other part of the plan, outside the normal budget process, is the economic stimulus package. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was presented in mid February and enacted into law shortly afterwards. It expands upon efforts begun weeks earlier to help financial institutions. This ambitious effort to stimulate the economy is meant to lift 2 million

people from poverty, protect the health care access of 20 million people, and save or create 3.5 million jobs. The money, over 780 billion dollars, will be used to shore up the financial sector, prevent more people from losing homes, safeguards jobs that had been on the cutting block, and stimulate the economy by creating jobs, jobs that will require materials and services, further stimulating the economy.

Through his frequent use of the word investment, President Obama has reminded us all that the term has other meanings than the ones most used in recent times. For some time now, many have used the term investment to describe purchasing shares of stock in distant companies, a gamble on the stability or growth of that firm or product, with the hope of some future financial reward. But the word also means paying for something with the idea that it will result in some non-financial benefit, perhaps after a delay, such as investing in roads or schools. Both the stimulus package and the budget strive to increase the nation's investment in long-term projects with potential paybacks in quality of life, environmental, health, economic and human terms.

Faced with a grim economic situation U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt, in the 1930s, created a number of government agencies designed to accomplish some similar goals to those addressed by this package. At the time almost 25% of the population was unemployed, many were hungry and without hope. Banks had collapsed, people were losing their homes. The Civilian Conservation Corps, National Youth Administration, Rural Electrification Administration, Tennessee Valley Authority, and the Works Progress Administration put people to work, often on projects with long-lasting benefits.

The Civilian Conservation Corps put 250,000 young men to work in jobs that helped conserve natural resources, while providing jobs, getting youth out of the cities, and supporting

families back home. The camps stimulated regional economies, and addressed forest, flood, fire and community safety issues. Today it is possible to drive across a rural mountain using a CCC road—they built 97,000 miles of them. They built parks, strung phone lines, and planted more than 3 billion trees. They built fire towers for spotting smoke. They improved drainage of agricultural land, worked on flood prevention, addressed disease and insect control, and improved forest lands.

The Rural Electrification Administration existed until fairly recently. It helped local communities form cooperatives to get electrical power. The Works Progress (and later Projects) Administration employed over 8 million workers in construction projects as well as others in the arts, theater, and literary projects. New Deal programs dealt with literacy, and vocational education to help prepare workers for jobs in factories and businesses.

Some of the projects were huge, and are still visible today, including public buildings and beautiful parkway roads; others simply gave someone a salary for a while and improved someone's life. Often the jobs taught both technical and life skills. Later many employers sought out these employees for the skills they'd learned in planning, budgeting, or working with others.

Another problem we face today, that was faced in Roosevelt's time, is the need to restore confidence in our financial system, in the safety of money invested, and in the availability of money to borrow. Roosevelt created the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Securities and Exchange Commission. These need to be examined and strengthened, and some new regulatory bodies may need to be formed to safeguard against threats that did not exist 90 years ago. Both domestically and globally we need to restore confidence in the U.S. financial system. The President's plans address these issues.

From today's stimulus package some jobs will strive first to put people to work. Others will help the people tackle important problems. In 1930 we needed basic electrical wiring. Today, the electrical grid needs to be improved, safeguarded, and also brought up to the needs of the 21st century. President Obama sees this as a matter of national security, but in addition, he wants wind generated in the plains of North Dakota to be able to provide power to cities like Chicago. He wants drivers of electric or hybrid cars to be able, at the end of the day, to plug their car in and send excess power into the grid for others to use, while making a profit themselves. Other projects include expansion of the internet into new communities, creation of a network of high speed trains, improved security in ports and industries, and new development addressing environmental concerns. The plan includes roads and bridges, dams and levees, renovating 10,000 schools, including libraries and laboratories so students can get the education they'll need to fill the jobs and work in the industries we're creating. There are plans to support small business, including with loans, and to support communities that would otherwise have to start laying off teachers, police and firefighters. The President wants to change the extensive fleet of vehicles in the federal government to more fuel efficient models, creating fuel savings over the lifetime of the vehicles while supporting the auto industry in the short term. These projects will stimulate the economy, stimulate the national emotional state, and support the development of key industries for the coming century.

There are two other noteworthy aspects of President's Obama's plan. The first is to bring fiscal responsibility to public spending, and to encourage it in the private sector. The President promises to look at federal programs, to make government work better, and use resources more wisely. Spending that results in a benefit will continue, but spending that results in waste, will be stopped. While there are many military, humanitarian and political reasons to reduce our

involvement in Iraq, no one will minimize the importance of the cost savings that are anticipated. President Obama wants to encourage similar scrutiny of, and inquiry into the ways companies do business, particularly those that are benefitting now from public, government support.

The final aspect is the long term cost of all these programs. The federal deficit is at an alarming level, and will increase over the short term. However, President Obama has considered this. If the investments made now prevent further deepening of the financial crisis, it will have been money well spent. If it puts the United States on the right road for future expansion in the health and energy industries, if it results in better infrastructure that supports fiscal growth in the long run, and actually results in future tax earnings by the government, then today's expenditures will in fact be directly responsible for reducing the deficit in the long run, and for reducing the burden on future generations--generations who may look back in 90 years, as we do now on Roosevelt's New Deal programs, with pride in buildings, roads, institutions, and social safety nets that were born in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

In conclusion, key elements of the President's financial plan include:

- Renewed confidence in the financial system.
- Renewed pride in the role the United States can play in solving global problems.
- An economy that is stable and growing, with jobs that are secure.
- Schools preparing students for the challenges they, and the nation will face.
- Healthcare available and affordable, and
- A renewed interest in service and excitement about our democratic processes.

In other words—Hope.