The Honorable Owen S. Aspinall
Governor of American Samoa
Pago Pago, American Samoa

Dear Governor Aspinall:

For nearly eight years, the NAEB has been actively engaged in the basic design and development of an educational system for American Samoa. The accomplishments of the system have attracted worldwide attention and have illustrated that it is possible to provide relevant educational opportunities for children whose situation presents them with fundamental and serious learning handicaps.

The NAEB is proud of what has been undertaken and what has been achieved in American Samoa. It is especially aware of the personal and professional contributions that a large number of American educators and technicians have made in order to give life and meaning to a unique educational plan. Likewise, we are also aware of the willing and confident trust of many Samoan educators and leaders for whom the plan was designed and upon whom its success will continue to depend.

The operation of the new Samoan system of education is now in its fifth year: 4 elementary schools opened in the fall of 1964; now, 25 elementary schools and 4 high schools are in full operation. To complete its development phase, which would embrace a full twelve years of schooling under the new program, requires seven more years of dedicated effort and continuity of leadership.

February 28, 1969, is the termination date of the current budget period for the NAEB-GAS contract. This is a suitable time for the NAEB to consider whether the conditions in American Samoa are such that it would be wise for us to extend our relationship with the schools and the Government. Under favorable circumstances, the NAEB would be eager to continue its role as consultant to the Governor, educational and technical advisor to the Director of Education, and chief U.S. agency for handling the personnel recruitment and liaison with manufacturers, educational organizations, and government agencies.

The present situation is such that we cannot, in good conscience, continue this responsibility. There are many reasons why we would prefer to reach the opposite conclusion, but the arguments in favor of withdrawal are persuasive.
Since assuming office in the summer of 1967, your public statements to the contrary notwithstanding, it has been clear that the Governor's tolerance of the NAEB and the main officials in the Department of Education was grudging and impatient. All conversations between the NAEB and the Governor of American Samoa have illustrated a major failure to understand the central characteristics and needs of the education system, and an unwillingness to support it. It has been clear that evidence of discontent with NAEB's recruiting practices has been openly solicited by the Governor's office, giving rise to complaints that were minor or contrived for the purpose of satisfying the executive need for data.

It is in this general framework that the activities of the NAEB and the Department of Education have been consistently thwarted. A report of the Office of Survey and Review -- Audit Operation of December, 1967, to the Department of the Interior carefully overlooked the scope of responsibility embraced in the NAEB-GAS contract and questioned expenses involved in recruiting personnel for the Department of Education. This report was never officially forwarded to the NAEB by the Governor, nor was there ever any direct question from the Treasurer of American Samoa to the NAEB inquiring about questioned expenses. The report gave rise to serious questions of propriety and capability of NAEB in the Legislature. Inasmuch as the report had been accusative, it does not seem unreasonable that the NAEB should have been invited by the Governor to comment on it. This was never done, and our comments were made after special efforts to secure a copy of the report in Washington so that a reply could be put into the record. The NAEB supplied you with a detailed response that examined the charges. That report was withheld from the Legislature, thereby preventing any opportunity to correct misimpressions and misunderstandings.

Immediately upon your appointment as Governor, the NAEB outlined the need for increased salaries of contract personnel. After several exchanges of correspondence and a special meeting in Samoa, it was nine months later that you agreed to request authorization for increased funds from the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. The request was drafted by you and an Interior Department official. Weeks passed without action, and this request would never have been granted had not the NAEB followed through directly with the Interior Department and the Appropriations Committees. Upon approval of the Committees, it was two months before your office allowed the salaries to be implemented, in the meantime attempting to arrange a salary schedule whereby new personnel would be paid higher salaries than those already in the employ of the Department of Education! Only by convening a staff meeting of the Department were the employees able to persuade you to implement the increases; and at the meeting you gave your office full credit for securing the appropriate authorizations from the Congress.
Funds through the Office of Education assistance programs are not normally available to schools operated by the Department of the Interior and the Department of Defense. However, on the basis of information supplied by NAEB, permission was granted for Title III and Title V funds to be used to strengthen the educational and administrative staff and to undertake a regular evaluation and measurement program. This role of the NAEB has never been indicated to the Legislature, and they have been advised by your office and the Regional Director of the U.S.O.E. that additional funds are allocated to Samoa that have not been made available. The reason for the policy of the Appropriations Committees and a determination of whether earmarked U.S.O.E. funds are relevant to the Samoan education program were not disclosed. A special memorandum from NAEB, identifying the various education acts and the purposes for which their funds are reserved was transmitted to the Governor, but has not been forwarded to the Legislature.

The accomplishments of the education program in Samoa, accomplishments that have been noted by virtually every professional educator ever to visit and study the system, cannot easily be separated from the NAEB or the staff it has recruited to function there. To be sure, there have been personnel selections that have not worked out well. Difficulties of this kind are not uncommon to overseas recruitment, * so it is always necessary to screen candidates as thoroughly and personally as possible. Yet it is the failures whom you have selected as evidence of the NAEB's performance and not the successes. To collect evidence by selective omission is a harmful policy to all concerned and it has characterized the attitude of the Governor's office toward the NAEB in recent months. This is not a satisfactory basis on which to continue.

It is conceivable that the important educational lessons being demonstrated in Samoa would persuade the NAEB to maintain its interests, at considerable professional risk and inconvenience to itself, if it were not that the same tactics and behavior have seriously affected the leaders in the Department of Education. They have been publicly maligned and humiliated; they have been capriciously treated with respect to contract renewals, housing, early departures for bona fide professional reasons, and other regular personnel matters. There has been an unwillingness to carry forward to federal officials and the Congress financial needs of the Department of Education during its critical developmental period. Prorated budget cuts have seriously jeopardized the education program, and a recent memorandum outlining Major Program Issues for FY 1971 does not include education.

* In Tonga, a Peace Corps project has had 20% failure; in Western Samoa 35% of the Peace Corps Volunteers left before their assignments were completed. In American Samoa, only one of five VISTA families has remained.
In the technical area, you have recently directed that twenty-four receivers from a European manufacturer be ordered, contrary to all professional technical advice which suggested that a prototype receiver be given the same careful advance technical tests that American manufacturers were subjected to.

The impact of such actions by the Governor's office is debilitating and dysfunctional. Rather than keeping a staff alert, they keep it under constant threat. Good people do not deserve such treatment. There is, just recently, the public disclosure of wiretapping by the Governor's office, which has brought stern reprimand from an official of the Department of the Interior. The wiretap equipment has been removed but the man who felt it was necessary remains. These are not conditions under which we can in good faith recruit qualified and professional educators and technical specialists. They are not conditions under which we would urge the present ones to continue.

We have been informed officially by you that you have been examining the possibility of another contractor assuming the duties of the NAEB. On the assumption that the Governor has the immediate responsibility for those agencies under contract with the Government, our response has been that it is always appropriate for the Governor to assure himself that he is receiving services of a caliber that he desires, and we do not feel that the NAEB should consider that it has a contract to work with the Government of American Samoa for as long as it desires.

We have been informed unofficially that negotiations are underway with the University of Southern California. The negotiations are a consequence of specific intervention by the Director of the Regional Office of the U.S.O.E., and have been carried on without counsel from anyone in American Samoa who is a qualified educator familiar with the system. The Director of Education and his staff have not been involved, and they were purposefully excluded from any official discussions with a "study team" from U.S.C. This forecasts that the decisions related to an alternate contractor will be made by those who have the least personal knowledge of the important and unique educational work in Samoa.

We do not know at this time, whether you will be successful in persuading any other educational agency to assume the work that the NAEB has done for the past seven years. This does not alter our decision to withdraw.

Our interest and confidence in the educational plan in Samoa continues; our respect for the professional staff is high and unqualified; our trust that the Samoans are eager to extend the benefit of education to all their people was present at the beginning of our involvement and it continues. Should conditions change in Samoa that would permit an arrangement of mutual confidence between the Government and the NAEB, we should be pleased to reactivate this interest.
In withdrawing from our relationship with the Government of American Samoa, I wish to underline that we intend to communicate no lack of confidence or support for the Samoan and American educators who have played such a central role in making the program so successful. But we do not believe that our continued tolerance of the present circumstances will improve the conditions under which they work.

Above all, of course, it is essential that the children of American Samoa not be neglected. It is not the absence of the NAEB, but the reasons for our departure that make this the most important issue.

Sincerely,

William G. Harley
President

cc: Director of Education
Secretary of the Interior
Director, Office of Territories
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
Speaker, American Samoa House of Representatives
President, American Samoa Senate
Chairman, NAEB Executive Board