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## *Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen*

1947–

DELEGATE 2015–

REPUBLICAN FROM AMERICAN SAMOA

Amata Coleman Radewagen became the first woman elected to represent the territory of American Samoa in 2014. She holds the title of “Aumua” (orator/talking chief) from the village of Pago Pago in American Samoa’s capital. Radewagen has dedicated her career to bridging the gap between Washington, DC, and the Pacific Islands. Notably, Radewagen campaigned unsuccessfully for 10 straight congressional elections before winning. When asked about her perseverance, she responded, “My Dad’s motto, ‘*Sulu o le tautua*,’ remains what I stand for, ‘Torch of service.’”<sup>1</sup>

Amata Coleman was born on December 29, 1947, to Nora Stewart Coleman and Peter Tali Coleman, the first popularly elected governor of American Samoa.<sup>2</sup> One of 13 children, she counts Pago Pago, American Samoa, as her hometown. She attended Sacred Hearts Academy, a Roman Catholic preparatory school for girls in Honolulu, before earning a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Guam in 1975. She completed additional studies at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, and Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California. She married Fred Radewagen, with whom she has three children: Erika, Mark, and Kirsten.

Radewagen built up a résumé of pro-democracy international work on advance teams for presidential trips during the George H. W. Bush administration. Beginning in 1992, she taught democratic governance to professionals and politicians in countries such as Kazakhstan, Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, and Morocco. During this time, Radewagen was diagnosed with breast cancer; she began advocating on behalf of cancer awareness in 1993. She also served as chief diplomatic correspondent for the *Washington Pacific Report* from 1984 to 1997.<sup>3</sup> Beginning in 1997, Radewagen became a mainstay in the U.S. House of Representatives, working for Philip Crane of Illinois before moving to the office of J. C. Watts of Oklahoma in 1999. She then joined the staff of the House Republican Conference, where she worked until 2005, at which point she returned to Pago Pago to work as a community activist.<sup>4</sup>

Radewagen first ran for the office of Delegate from American Samoa in 1994 against incumbent Democrat Eni F. H. Faleomavaega. Though she only received 21 percent of the vote, Radewagen continued to campaign for the position in every following election. She failed to secure the Republican nomination in 1996 and 2000 and ran with no declared party affiliation in 1998.<sup>5</sup> In 2014 Faleomavaega’s declining health and long absences from the public eye became

a concern for constituents.<sup>6</sup> A known quantity after years of campaigning, Radewagen stumped on improving infrastructure and education for the territory's youth. The Pacific island was still recovering from the effects of the 2008 global recession and a 2009 tsunami; reliant on federal aid, constituents were eager for a more active voice in Washington. She went on to win 42 percent to Faleomavaega's 31 percent.<sup>7</sup>

Upon entering the 114th Congress (2015–2017), Radewagen was appointed to three committees: Natural Resources, Veterans' Affairs, and Small Business. She was vice chairman of the Natural Resources Subcommittee on Indian, Insular and Alaska Native Affairs and chairman of the Small Business Subcommittee on Health and Technology. In the 115th Congress (2017–2019), she continued serving on the same three committees and as the chairman of the Small Business Committee's Health and Technology Subcommittee. Her years as a Hill staffer helped her form working relationships with other Republicans and provided her more support for legislation favoring the territory.

Radewagen's primary agenda has been to preserve the political will of the people of American Samoa. In June 2015, she supported an appellate court judge's decision not to grant birthright citizenship to people of the territory, insisting that American Samoans "should have the final say in matters concerning their political status."<sup>8</sup> Later that year, she pushed to delay a planned minimum wage increase in the territory, explaining that the island's economy had yet to recover from the 2008 recession. The bill (H.R. 2617) passed the House by voice vote and became law in October 2015.<sup>9</sup> In late 2016, she submitted a bill (H.R. 6452) to ensure access to Pacific fisheries for the territories following the regulations of international convention. This bill, supporting a crucial industry in American Samoa, passed the House by unanimous consent and was signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 16, 2016.<sup>10</sup> Radewagen has been a consistent voice for veterans' affairs, a key constituency in American Samoa, which maintains the highest rate of enlistment in the U.S. armed forces.<sup>11</sup>

Radewagen handily won re-election in 2016 with 74.5 percent of the vote against four independent competitors, none of whom garnered more than 15 percent of the vote.<sup>12</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 "Aumua Amata Launches Her Campaign for Delegate Seat," 9 June 2014, *Samoa News*, <https://samoanews.com/aumua-amata-launches-her-campaign-delegate-seat> (accessed 14 November 2014).
- 2 Eric Pace, "Peter Coleman, 77, Governor of American Samoa," 1 May 1997, *New York Times*: 16.
- 3 "Aumua Amata Radewagen's Biography," Project Vote Smart, accessed 8 May 2017, <https://votesmart.org/candidate/biography/128380/aumua-amata-radewagen#.WRCgGLXyU>.
- 4 "Aumua Amata Launches Her Campaign for Delegate Seat."
- 5 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>.
- 6 Timothy Cama, "American Samoa Delegate Loses Seat," 5 November 2014, *The Hill*, <http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/house-races/223113-american-samoa-delegate-loses-seat> (accessed 1 May 2017); "Am. Samoa: Candidates Line Up for Run at Faleomavaega's Seat; Memorial Day: Faleomavaega Again a No Show," 26 May 2014, *Hawai'i Free Press*, <http://www.hawaiifreepress.com/ArticlesMain/tabid/56/ID/12720/Am-Samoa-Candidates-Line-up-for-Run-at-Faleomavaegas-Seat.aspx> (accessed 1 May 2017).
- 7 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present"; "Aumua Amata Launches Her Campaign for Delegate Seat."
- 8 *Almanac of American Politics, 2016* (United States: Columbia Books and Information Services, 2015): 2041.
- 9 *Congressional Record*, House, 114th Cong., 1st sess. (28 September 2015): H6281–H6284; Public Law 114-61, 129 Stat. 545 (2015).
- 10 *Congressional Record*, House, 114th Cong., 2nd sess. (8 December 2016): H7540; Ensuring Access to Pacific Fisheries Act, Public Law 114-327, 130 Stat. 1974 (2016).
- 11 *Congressional Record*, Extension of Remarks, 114th Cong., 1st sess. (16 November 2015): E1623.
- 12 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present."