

STATEMENT OF REPS. NEIL ABERCROMBIE & MAZIE K. HIRONO ON HOUSE CONSIDERATION OF AKAKA BILL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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We are pleased the House will be considering HR 505, the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act of 2007, and we look forward to a full and thoughtful discussion of the measure on the House floor Wednesday. Unfortunately, this legislation, like other measures addressing the needs of Native Hawaiians and Alaskan Natives, has been misinterpreted and mischaracterized by opponents in the past. It would therefore be productive to begin the public discussion of what has become known as the Akaka Bill with some factual background.

The Government of the United States recognized the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Hawaii more than 175 years ago, accorded the Kingdom full diplomatic recognition and entered into treaties and conventions in 1826, 1842, 1849, 1875 and 1887, all ratified by Congress.

In 1893, the Kingdom of Hawaii was illegally overthrown by American commercial interests with the tacit support of the United States Navy. The U.S. Government has formally apologized for that action, and in 1921, Congress passed the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, which set aside more than 200,000 acres of land for the benefit of the Native Hawaiian people, recognized in law as an indigenous people and former citizens of a sovereign nation. The lands are for homesteads and farms for Native Hawaiian families. In addition, some 1,800,000 acres ceded from the time of the kingdom to succeeding governmental agencies are now administered by the State of Hawaii.

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This legislation allows Native Hawaiian people to decide for themselves the organization of the government entity to represent their interests in a relationship with the U.S. government. The relationship parallels that of Native Americans tribes and Alaskan Natives.

The Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act does not create a program or entitlement. It does not require an appropriation. It is not based on racial groups or set-asides or preferences. It doesn't turn over assets of the U.S. government, nor give anyone title to anything they do not already own. It simply provides a method for the State of Hawaii to divest itself of requirements for administering land and dollar assets to a native entity, which will take full responsibility.

Legislation dealing with Native Hawaiians and Alaskan Natives has had the support of every Republican and Democratic Chairman since its introduction. It has never been a partisan issue in the Resources Committee, nor in the State of Hawaii.

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