

# House Passes Native Hawaiian Bill

By JIM ABRAMS

WASHINGTON (AP) — Native Hawaiians should regain some of the self-governance powers lost when the islands' queen was overthrown more than a century ago, the House decided Wednesday.

The White House threatened a veto, saying the legislation that passed by a 261-153 vote would divide Americans "along suspect lines of race and ethnicity."

The bill would give the 400,000 people nationwide of Native Hawaiian ancestry the right to form a governing entity that could negotiate with the state and federal governments over such issues as control of natural resources, lands and assets. The interior secretary would have to approve that governing body.

Native Hawaiians, who long have sought the bill, insist they deserve many of the self-autonomy rights provided to American Indians and Native Alaskans.

The legislation is backed by Hawaii's Republican governor, Linda Lingle, its Legislature and the state's all-Democratic congressional delegation, including Native Hawaiian Sen. Daniel Akaka.

The vote on the proposal was the first in the House since the chief sponsor, Rep. Neil Abercrombie of Hawaii, won passage in 2000. Last year Akaka fell four votes short of the 60 needed to advance the bill to a final vote in the Senate.

To win over critics, the legislation spells out that the Native Hawaiian government could not take private land or set up gambling operations similar to those allowed to Indians.

The bill would not affect military facilities in the state and Native Hawaiians would not gain new eligibility for programs and services available to Indians.

Rep. Mazie Hirono of Hawaii said the measure would begin to "provide a measure of justice" to Native Hawaiians who "have an inherent sovereignty based on their status as indigenous people."

Abercrombie said Native Hawaiians have ceded some 1.8 million acres since Queen Lili'uokalani was driven from the throne in 1893. "This creates the opportunity for Native Hawaiians to take responsibility for their own actions with regard to the control and administration of their own assets," he said.

But the White House said the bill "raises significant constitutional concerns that arise anytime legislation seeks to separate American citizens into race-related classifications rather than according to their own merits and essential qualities."

The House GOP leader, Rep. John Boehner of Ohio, said "granting broad government powers to an exclusive group based on race is simply unconstitutional."

Republican opponents of the legislation also said it could open the door for Native Hawaiians to declare territorial independence from the United States.

The rights of Native Hawaiians have been an issue since the 1893 coup.

In 1959, when Hawaii became a state, the federal government pledged to use lands and assets to the benefit of Native Hawaiians. In 1993, on the 100th anniversary of the coup, Congress approved a resolution apologizing for the illegal overthrow and acknowledging that Native Hawaiians never directly relinquished their claims to sovereignty over their lands.

The legislation still needs to be considered by the Senate, where it is backed by two of the chamber's most senior members — Hawaii's Akaka and Sen. Daniel Inouye.

Akaka said in a statement that the House vote "provides great momentum in our effort to extend federal recognition to Hawaii's indigenous people."