

**Statement of Chairman Daniel K. Akaka  
Committee on Indian Affairs Oversight Hearing on  
Stolen Identities: The Impact of Racist Stereotypes on Indigenous Peoples  
May 5, 2011**

Today's hearing entitled "Stolen Identities: The Impact of Racist Stereotypes on Indigenous Peoples" explores the far-reaching impacts of mis-portrayals of Native peoples.

The effects of institutional stereotypes go beyond having a symbol around which to rally team spirit or to provide entertainment. This is not an issue about people being offended. Our hearing is about the real harm that is done to all people, Native and non-Native alike, when mascots, movies and images reinforce the stereotypes and lines that divide rather than unite us.

As a Native Hawaiian and as Chairman of this Committee, it is important to do things right. In Hawaiian, we call it *pono*. Many peoples have a similar sense of what is right. To conduct ourselves in a manner that is *pono*, we must do the right things, for the right reasons, and in the right ways.

This week, we are praising our intelligence and military personnel for their tenacity and unwaivering commitment to bring Osama bin Laden to justice. They have made us proud, and I commend them. Our dedicated service members remain on the front lines in Afghanistan as Al-Qaeda continues operations across the globe, and we cannot thank them enough for their service and sacrifice. We must remain vigilant and determined in our efforts to protect the American people.

It may be little known, but Native Americans have the highest volunteer military service rates, per capita, of any group. We have won wars utilizing the unique languages of Native peoples. Just earlier this week, this nation's highest military award, the Medal of Honor, was awarded to a Native soldier. Native Americans have demonstrated, time and time again, a commitment to our nation's military and its security.

This week, I have received many letters and messages from tribes, Native leaders and Native veterans across the country expressing dismay with the use of Geronimo's name in the successful operation to kill Osama bin Laden. This victory has otherwise united our country, and it is unfortunate that this code name was chosen.

That Native Americans have concerns over the unintended impacts of connecting the name of Geronimo with Osama bin Laden, in the face of their overwhelming sense of patriotism and service, only highlights the need for the larger discussion we are having today.

As a nation, diversity has always been our strength. It is my hope that this hearing will help bring the impacts of common mis-portrayals of Native peoples to light, so we can work as a nation to resolve these concerns in a manner that is *pono*.

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