

February 25, 2003

Testimony of:  
**Honorable Governor Linda Lingle (R – Hawaii)**  
**State of Hawaii**

Before the:  
**Senate Committee on Indian Affairs**  
**Washington DC**

Good Morning Chairman Campbell, Vice Chairman Inouye, and members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. Thank you for inviting me to appear before you. For the record, I am Linda Lingle, Governor of the great state of Hawaii, and I am honored to be here.

I come before you today to express my support for passage of the Native Hawaiian Federal Recognition Bill, which is known throughout Hawaii as the Akaka Bill. My administration and both houses of the Hawaii State Legislature believe this is the right thing to do -- for Native Hawaiians, for the state of Hawaii, and for the United States.

Native Hawaiians are an important constituency in our state for many reasons. The Native Hawaiian culture is the foundation of the character of the state of Hawaii, and the basis for common understanding among our varied ethnic populations. Our very identity as a state is founded on Native Hawaiian values, cultural practices and knowledge. Their willingness to share that knowledge and understanding has enriched all who call Hawaii home. We have learned much from Native Hawaiians, and have much more to learn.

As a Republican Governor, I am happy to be working in close harmony with our Hawaii Democratic Congressional Delegation on this critically important issue. Senator Inouye, Senator Akaka, Representative Case and Representative Abercrombie stand united in their support, and I proudly stand with them, along with the Hawaii State Legislature.

We recognize that there will be differences of opinion in our approaches to many of the challenges we face, but we also recognize the value of aloha and working in a bi-partisan manner to resolve issues of great importance to the people of our state. The people of Hawaii have

voiced their support on this issue in many ways. For example, both Republicans and Democrats in Hawaii have supported federal recognition for Native Hawaiians in party platforms.

We are united in asking Congress to pass the Akaka Bill into law, thereby reaffirming the political relationship between the United States and the Indigenous people of Hawaii. This bill is vital to the survival of the Native Hawaiian people; it is vital to the continued character of our state; and it is vital to providing parity and consistency in federal policy for all Native peoples in America.

As public-policy makers, all of us in this room believe deeply in the goodness of our great country, and in the strength of its democratic ideals.

America's Indigenous Peoples are America's First Peoples, and American Indians of the 48 states, Alaska Natives of the 49<sup>th</sup> state, and Native Hawaiians of the 50<sup>th</sup> state have demonstrated their love for this country and made contributions that all U.S. citizens can be proud of. Indeed, our federal government owes our First Citizens a great debt of gratitude.

We policy makers owe it to ourselves to live up to the promise and power of Democracy and Justice for All, and to continue our journey by recognizing the inherent rights of the Indigenous Peoples of our country.

There have been many eras of federal policy toward Native Peoples over the centuries -- none so promising as the current one of self-determination and self-governance that has already been extended to American Indians and Alaska Natives.

It is time to set a new course in Hawaii. Specifically, it is time to extend this federal policy of self-determination and self-governance to the Native Hawaiian people.

The people of Hawaii respectfully submit that simple justice requires that Native Hawaiians be empowered to determine their own future by employing their own solutions. I am confident that they will rise to the challenge.

I have found an abundance of talent, energy, and a love of democracy among members of the Native Hawaiian community, including many who serve in my administration. Bob Awana is my Chief of Staff and Micah Kane heads the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands. Dr. Chiyome Fukino left a successful medical practice to serve the larger community of Hawaii as Director of the Department of Health. Georgina Kawamura serves as our Director of Budget and Finance. Rick Bissen runs the Attorney General's office as First Deputy, and Kathy Watanabe heads our Department of Human Resources and Development. James Aiona is Hawaii's Lieutenant Governor. These are just the most visible of many Native Hawaiians who serve the people of Hawaii as members of my administration. They serve with competence, passion and vitality.

Many of you have worked with our Native Hawaiian Senator Daniel Akaka for a number of years. You know him by his Aloha, by his gentle spirit, and by his commitment to these United States. Like the individuals in my administration that I have named, Senator Akaka knows what it means to be Native Hawaiian, to be from Hawaii, and to be an American.

Like all Native peoples around the country, these individuals have embraced the promise of our democracy and now use their unique knowledge of our islands, and of its diverse people, to serve the public -- and in doing so they do not give up what it means to be Native Hawaiian. They do not and have not abandoned their collective rights as Native Hawaiians to be self-governing and to practice and perpetuate a cultural heritage whose home is only found in one tiny part of our world, the Hawaiian Islands. Despite the historical events and policies that worked against them, Native Hawaiians have an unbroken desire for self-governance as a means of perpetuating their way of life and their culture, for future generations.

Passage of the Akaka bill will provide Native Hawaiians with an opportunity owed to them for many years -- the right to engage their best talents and best ideas as full partners of the State and Federal governments. Passage of this bill holds great promise for Native Hawaiians, and it holds great promise for our state and all its citizens. My administration believes that what is just and good for Native Hawaiians is just and good for all our people.

There have been concerns shared with me about what this bill might lead to -- like gambling, or creating a divide among peoples in my state. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I do not support gambling in Hawaii; Native Hawaiians have not collectively enunciated a desire for legalized gambling; and this Bill does nothing to permit it. The State of Hawaii controls whether or not there will be gambling in Hawaii. This is true today and it would be true after enactment of this bill.

This bill would not divide the people of Hawaii. To the contrary, by doing what is right for Native Hawaiians, passage of the Akaka Bill would enable all the peoples of Hawaii to move forward and reach our potential together.

How, I ask you, can providing justice for long-standing wrongs ever be divisive? The underlying principles of our country tell us that justice and a recognition of rights -- personal and collective -- is the very definition of our unity. Our state motto -- Ua mau ke 'ea o ka 'aina i ka pono, the life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness -- says it well.

The life of Hawaii and unity of its diverse peoples are perpetuated by doing what is right.

The Native Hawaiian Federal Recognition Bill brings parity and consistency to our federal policies on America's Indigenous People. The Native Hawaiian people of my state deserve nothing less. This bill provides a process that has not existed before, for the Hawaiian people to take hold of their destiny and to have a rightful place at the table in making decisions for themselves. I have every confidence that if this opportunity is granted to them, Native Hawaiians will find within their community an approach that works for themselves, for our state, and for this nation.

Members of the Committee, I urge you to pass the Native Hawaiian Recognition Bill out of your committee and to urge your colleagues in the full Senate to pass this bill without hesitation. In

doing so, you will recognize the contributions of Native Hawaiians and the value of their continued and enhanced vitality to my state and our nation.

In doing so, you also will recognize what is righteous, what is practical, and what is just.

Mahalo and Thank You.