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MEDIA RELEASE

OHA Praises Recent Clarifications to NHGRA that Help Facilitate Bill Passage in Congress

OHA Stands Ready to Facilitate an Open, Democratic Process to Reorganize a Native Hawaiian Governing Entity Upon the Bill's Passage

HONOLULU, HAWAII (July 7, 2010) The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) today commends the Hawai'i Congressional delegation, Sens. Daniel Akaka and Daniel Inouye, and Hawai'i Governor Linda Lingle and Attorney General Mark Bennett for agreeing to new clarifications to the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act (NHGRA) -- also known as the "Akaka Bill" after the author Hawaiian Senator Daniel Akaka -- that are expected to help facilitate the bill's passage in the U.S. Congress.

The changes clarify that the state laws -- as well as health and safety regulations -- will apply throughout the negotiation process between the Native Hawaiian governing entity, the State of Hawai'i and the U.S. government to determine powers and authorities among the three governing entities. The changes, which address concerns raised by the Hawai'i Attorney General, are also designed to ensure that Native Hawaiians are treated fairly.

"We are very pleased that the clarifications being made will allow all of us to move forward, in the Senate, on what we expect will be swift passage of this landmark bill," said Haunani Apoliona, Chairperson, Office of Hawaiian Affairs. "We commend the members of Hawai'i's congressional delegation, Senator Akaka, Senator Inouye, Governor Lingle, Attorney General Bennett and the Obama Administration for agreeing to work together to ensure NHGRA moves a step closer toward successful passage. Thanks to their leadership and vision, the Hawaiian people will have a process for a government-to-government relationship to speak with a collective voice and greater political strength to protect our lands, our culture and our way of life. This is a long awaited opportunity for ALL Hawaiians, wherever they may reside, to participate in the process and to make a difference for both now and future generations," Apoliona said.

"Upon successful passage of the bill, OHA stands ready to facilitate an open, fair, democratic and inclusive process in which a Native Hawaiian governing entity will be reorganized -- by, and for,

Native Hawaiians,” said Clyde Nāmu’o, OHA’s chief executive officer. “OHA is uniquely positioned to help facilitate this process due to the constitutional mandate that requires us to act on behalf of, and in the best interest of, Native Hawaiians. We are humbled and honored to help guide this monumental task, and we will do our utmost to meet and exceed the hopes and dreams of Native Hawaiians,” Nāmu’o added.

NHGRA represents a major milestone that moves Native Hawaiians closer to reconciliation more than a century after Queen Lili’uokalani and the Hawaiian government were illegally overthrown. The bill recognizes the inherent sovereignty of Native Hawaiians and provides them with the opportunity to reorganize a Native Hawaiian governing entity that will negotiate for powers, authorities, land, and resources. Until now, Native Hawaiians are the only group of Native Americans in the 50 states that has not been provided a process for federal recognition; Alaska Natives and American Indians have had federal recognition for many years.

“I am confident that the passage of NHGRA will be a good thing, not only for Native Hawaiians but for all Hawai’i too. That’s because we can now finally bring closure to an issue that has prevented our state from realizing its full potential for over a century,” Nāmu’o said. “Swift passage of this bill will mean that Native Hawaiians can start rebuilding a governing body, and all Hawai’i residents and visitors can look forward to seeing a stronger, healthier, more prosperous Hawai’i, one that includes Native Hawaiians playing an active role in contributing to the larger collective good,” he added.

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Contact: Lloyd Yonenaka
Media Relations and Messaging Manager
Phone: 808-594-1982
Email: lloyd@oha.org