

'Nutgrass network' conspiracy?

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(The following is part one in a series that will highlight "nutgrass network" connections, like the Grassroot Institute of Hawai'i, the Heritage Foundation, Citizens for Equal Rights Alliance and Aloha For All. There will be more to come in subsequent months.)

Aloha nui kākou e nā 'ōiwi 'ōlino. Important decisions from diverse opinions are made when we find common ground. The capacity to find common ground for fairness and justice is a direct product of our values and priorities. Our values and priorities move us to act. Ironically, it is our actions that decisively reveal our values and priorities. But much more is revealed to those who discern below the surface observations, "to hear what is not said, to see what can not be seen" as Queen Lili'uokalani said.

Reflecting on the June 8, 2006, decision by the U.S. Senate to choke hold and stall the debate and vote on the Akaka Bill, I decided to track the facts about the values and priorities driving Grassroot Institute of Hawai'i (GRIH), Heritage Foundation, Citizens for Equal Rights Alliance and Aloha For All, as well as the values and priorities of other local and mainland-based groups in the GRIH network, how they interconnect and share like-values in a "nutgrass network" (a concept most understandable to those who till the soil).

Do members of this nutgrass network intentionally disregard or mischaracterize the indigenous legal and political status of American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians in the 50 states? Is the real and lasting negative consequences to Native Hawaiian families caused by the erosion of self-determination, loss of connection with the land, degradation of cultural and social institutions and forced removal of indigenous governance for commercial gain at the expense of Native Hawaiians a trivial matter? Do these select individuals believe no just

and fair reconciliation is necessary to heal the deep and profound effects of the methodically planned illegal overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani an indigenous sovereign leadership?

Do the values and priorities motivating GRIH and their nutgrass network associates seek to strengthen or destroy the unique spirit of Hawai'i and the fabric of our island communities emanating from out Native Hawaiian host culture? The more profound question is, Will people of compassion, honor, fairness, justice, who celebrate diversity as a strength rather than fear it, allow Hawai'i deteriorate in spirit and culture? Future columns will address these questions.

This nutgrass network conspiracy is reminiscent of earlier Hawaiian history. This nutgrass conspiracy has a historical counterpart in Lorrin Thurston's Hawaiian League of 1887, which was purported to support "decent and honest government in Hawai'i," grew in number to 400 members and under Sanford Dole's leadership forced King Kalākaua to sign the Bayonet Constitution in 1887.

In 1892, the core leaders of that Hawaiian League, under Lorrin Thurston's leadership, became the Annexation Club, which called for the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani. This group was renamed the Committee of Safety (after the French Revolution model).

This latter group prevailed on U.S. diplomat John Stevens to land 162 fully armed American marines on January 16, 1893, to overthrow the Hawaiian monarchy. To save the lives of her subjects, Queen Lili'uokalani surrendered, under protest, on January 17, 1893.

The nutgrass conspiracy is comparable to the secretive groups in early Hawaiian history that operated by trying to install their version of America with the intent of concurrently destroying what was Hawaiian. All who are part of the unique multi-cultural Hawai'i of today, especially Native Hawaiians, should be wary of these attempts to amalgamate Hawai'i into a "melting pot stew" with no appreciation of Hawai'i's current rainbow of parallel colorful, distinctive strands of unique peoples fueled by fundamental disregard for the host culture.



The Hawaiian's phantom menace

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'Ano'ai ke aloha iā kākou. In early June, trustees traveled to Washington, D.C., to witness the long awaited vote on the Akaka Bill in the U.S. Senate. What should have been a historic event quickly turned into a frustrating experience. Listening to senators from the South speak against the bill, calling it "racist legislation," made me want to jump out of the gallery and scream, "HYPOCRITES!" Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) shockingly said that granting federal recognition for Native Hawaiians could lead to Mormons, the Amish and Hasidic Jews seeking their own federal recognition! It was clear that his goal was to lump Hawaiians together with other minorities so he could argue that we all need to be treated equally. It is an undisputed fact that Hawaiians are indigenous people, similar to Native Americans and Native Alaskans, both of whom are already recognized. Sen. Alexander is clearly discriminating against Hawaiians. Who's the real racist?

When the vote was taken, we were four votes shy. Two Democrats were out sick, and thanks to arm-twisting by Senate Leader Bill Frist (R-TN), at least three Republicans switched their vote at the last minute. Sen. Frist told them that their leadership positions would be in jeopardy if they supported the Akaka Bill, and they choose to protect their political careers rather than keep their promises to Sens. Akaka and Inouye.

At the end of that sad day, two things were clear. First, racism and ignorance is alive and well in the U.S. Senate. Second, partisan politics have ruined Congress. The trustees later learned that the Republicans were bitter with the Democrats for voting against their estate tax bill the day before. Killing the Akaka Bill was just payback. I left Washington with a feeling of disgust and disdain for our so-called leaders of America.

With so many important issues that need to be dealt, these career politicians proved they are preoccupied with keeping the status quo and furthering their political careers. They use inflammatory issues like gay rights, flag burning and immigration to detract us from the real issues of importance, like New Orleans,

North Korea, Iran and Iraq. Is it any wonder why Americans are losing respect for their leaders and can't believe a word they say?

As bad as the southern senators were, it was sickening to see former OHA Trustee Clarence Ching sitting with William Burgess, the lawyer who has consistently sued OHA, the state and the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands. Burgess has lobbied Congress to kill the Akaka Bill and has called Hawaiians who favor federal recognition "racists." And let's not forget about State Senator Sam Slom, the only member of the state Legislature in 2005 to vote "no" on the state resolution (HCR 56, SD1) supporting the Akaka Bill. He was also there with Burgess. It is just bizarre that a Republican state senator would so vigorously oppose a bill that the Republican governor so strongly supports. Not to mention the fact that all of Hawai'i's other elected officials including the mayors from all counties and the state Legislature also supported federal recognition in a non-partisan effort. It is egregious that one elected official felt his opinion was more important than all of the state's other elected officials. Since when does a single opinion become more important than the will of the people?

Where and when did this opposition to Hawaiian sovereignty begin? Some rumors have been circulating that it was started years ago by a prominent kama'āina who called a meeting of other like-minded people to his home to discuss how they could band together and prevent the Bishop Estate, DHHL and OHA from becoming too powerful. After all, with control over vast tracts of land and revenues from ceded lands, Hawaiians could one day dominate the state, and this is a frightening thought for some. While I have no evidence that this long-standing rumor is true, I have been thinking very seriously about it lately.

After the fall of the former Bishop Estate trustees, all of their cases were later thrown out of court, but it was too late to save most of their reputations. Now we find ourselves embroiled in more lawsuits to take out OHA and Hawaiian Homes. So, could the rumor be true? I think the question to ask is who is paying for all of the lawsuits that Mr. Burgess has filed? Perhaps then we may have the clues to who is behind the movement to ensure Hawaiians never regain sovereignty and that all Hawaiian entitlements are erased. I mua e Hawai'i nei...

For more information on important Hawaiian issues, check out my website at www.rowenaakana.org.

