

STATEMENT OF
SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE
BEFORE THE
MAY 3, 2007 HEARING
ON S. 310
THE NATIVE HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION ACT

I thank Chairman Dorgan and Vice Chairman Thomas for scheduling this important hearing today on a bill that Senator Akaka and I have worked tirelessly on for the past 7 years.

This bill is important to all of the citizens of the State of Hawaii. For those of us who were born and raised in Hawaii, as I was, we have always understood that the indigenous people of Hawaii – the Native Hawaiian people – have a status that is unique in our State.

This status is enshrined in our State Constitution, and it is reflected in the laws of our State. It is found in well over a hundred Federal statutes – including the Hawaii Admissions Act. It is a status that reflects our deep gratitude to the native people who first welcomed us to their shores and who gave us the opportunity to live in their traditional homelands.

Mr. Chairman, in my nearly 30 years of service on this committee, I have been fortunate to learn a bit about the history of this country and its relations with the indigenous, native people, who occupied and exercised sovereignty on this continent.

As a nation, we have changed course many times in the policies governing our dealings with the Native people. We began with treaties with the Native people, and then we turned to war. We enacted laws recognizing Native governments, and then we passed laws terminating our relationships with those governments. We repudiated our termination policy and restored our relationships with Native governments. Finally, for the last 37 years, we adopted a policy of recognizing and supporting the rights of this nation's First Americans to self-determination and self-governance. We have been firm in our resolve to uphold that policy.

Native Hawaiians have had a political and legal relationship with the United States for the past 140 years – as shown through treaties with the United States and in scores of Federal statutes. But like the Native people whose Federally-recognized status was terminated, the government of Hawaii that represented the Native Hawaiian people was overthrown with the assistance of U.S. troops on January 17, 1893.

Native Hawaiians seek the full restoration of the government-to-government relationship they had with the United States. As one who has served the citizens of the State of Hawaii for over 50 years, as both a member of Congress and the Territorial Legislature, I believe that there is broad-based support in our State for what the Native people of Hawaii are seeking.

The courts have concluded that termination can only be reversed by an act of Congress. In my view, and I believe in the view of those I have pledged to represent, the time for reconciliation is long overdue – and the time for restoration is now.