

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. As you know, this is the fourth Congress in which this committee is considering this legislation. Our committee favorably reported the bill in the 106th, 107th, and 108th Congresses and I am hopeful and confident that our colleagues on this committee will once again support our efforts to extend the federal policy of self-governance and self-determination to Native Hawaiians.

Mr. Chairman, I want to begin by thanking Hawaii's Governor, Linda Lingle, for joining us this morning. Since her election in 2002, I have worked closely with Governor Lingle and appreciate all that she has done in working to gain the support of the Bush Administration for the enactment of this bill. Governor Lingle's support demonstrates an important facet of this bill – the fact that for the people of Hawaii, addressing the conditions of Hawaii's indigenous peoples, Native Hawaiians, is a nonpartisan priority.

Anyone who has lived in Hawaii has experienced the Aloha

spirit - a special attitude which exudes happiness and generosity towards all. The Aloha spirit, for which the people of Hawaii are known, is grounded in the culture and tradition of Hawaii's indigenous peoples. For that reason, Hawaii's citizens, whether or not they are Native Hawaiian, appreciate and support efforts to preserve the culture and tradition of Native Hawaiians. A large majority of Hawaii's residents support our efforts to enact this bill - because it is the right thing to do for Native Hawaiians and for the people of Hawaii.

The Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act does three things. It establishes the Office of Native Hawaiian Relations in the Department of the Interior to serve as a liaison between Native Hawaiians and the United States. It establishes the Native Hawaiian Interagency Coordinating Group to be composed of federal officials from agencies which administer Native Hawaiian programs. Both of these provisions are intended to increase coordination between the Native Hawaiians and the federal government.

Finally, the bill provides a process of reorganization of the Native Hawaiian governing entity. I am very proud of the fact that while the bill provides structure to the process, it also provides the Native Hawaiian community with the flexibility to truly reorganize its governing entity.

Mr. Chairman, as you may recall, in 1993, we enacted legislation I drafted which is referred to as the Apology Resolution. The resolution apologized for the actions of U.S. agents in the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii. The resolution also addressed a process of reconciliation between Native Hawaiians and the United States. The process of reconciliation involves an incremental dialogue between Native Hawaiians and the United States to discuss many of the longstanding issues resulting from the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii.

My bill, Mr. Chairman, provides the structure for this process of reconciliation. The bill provides that following federal recognition of the Native Hawaiian governing entity, the federal and state governments and the Native Hawaiian government will

begin negotiations to address matters such as the transfer of lands, natural resources and other assets, the exercise of governmental authority over such lands and resources, the exercise of civil and criminal jurisdiction and the exercise of governmental powers and authorities by the Native Hawaiian government. This, for me, Mr. Chairman, will be a large step in the process of reconciliation.

For far too long the people of Hawaii have lacked a structured process to deal with these issues. This bill holds the promise for all of us in Hawaii to come to terms with Hawaii's unique, and often painful history; to rectify inequities; and to move on as a State.

It is for this reason that I have worked so hard over the past six years to enact this measure. I believe this bill is critical for Native Hawaiians who seek greater autonomy over the use of their lands and natural resources and programs and services. I also believe that this measure is just as important for non-Native Hawaiians as it provides us with a process to finally, after 112

years, begin to resolve the longstanding issues which resulted from what is considered by many to be the most poignant experience in Hawaii's history, the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii.

Our native brothers and sisters in Alaska and in Indian Country understand our efforts and I thank them for their unending support over the years. They have always been willing to work with us to ensure that we benefit from the lessons they have learned. For this generosity, we will always be indebted to them.

I ask each of my colleagues here to stand with us as we work to extend the federal policy of self-governance and self-determination to Hawaii's indigenous peoples - an effort for those in Hawaii that erases the boundaries between political parties and differences.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.