

TESTIMONY OF D. NOELANI KALIPI
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
Oversight Hearing on Programs and Services for Native Veterans

Thursday, May 24, 2012
2:15 p.m.

Aloha Chairman Akaka, Vice-Chairman Barasso and Distinguished Members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to share information with you about the Veteran to Farmer initiative we are implementing on the island of Hawaii.

Background

My name is D. Noelani Kalipi and I am a Native Hawaiian Veteran. I work with TiLeaf Group, a native social enterprise. We work with native and non-native companies and organizations focused on projects, services and programs that contribute to the well-being of native communities. A substantial portion of our activity is focused on economic development and empowerment in native communities involving energy, agricultural and data security initiatives.

I served on active duty in the United States Army Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAGC) where I was stationed at Fort Stewart, Georgia, home to the 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized). As a young JAGC attorney, I served in a number of positions. I found my experience with the Trial Defense Service (TDS) to be the most insightful. As a TDS attorney, I represented soldiers facing non-judicial punishment, administrative separation, or courts-martial. I learned very quickly about the trials and tribulations faced by soldiers and their families as they struggled to balance rigorous training and deployment schedules with demands and challenges of everyday life. While many military members thrive in these conditions, I worked primarily with those who encountered difficulties. These experiences served me well in my professional career which has led me to work with military members and Veterans in various capacities.

Native Veterans

Native Veterans have a strong tradition of military service despite the often tragic circumstances underlying the history between the federal government and their native governments. Native Veterans have served at the highest rate per capita of any population in the United States. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), studies have also shown that Native Veterans suffer disproportionately from the consequences of service, including higher rates of disorders related to combat exposure.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 27, 800 Veterans identified themselves as single-race Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders. Four out of five of these Veterans are 65 years old or younger. This means we have a relatively

young population of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Veterans. Additionally, given the multicultural population in Hawaii, a large number of Native Hawaiians identify themselves in the multi-race category. We therefore know that we have a significantly larger population of Native Hawaiian Veterans in the United States.

Of the 117,000 Veterans living in Hawaii, a significant number are native Veterans who have been born and raised in Hawaii. Like our native brethren in Indian Country and Alaska, Native Hawaiians have a cultural and spiritual tie to our lands - we seek to live on our lands and will find a way to survive in our homeland because no matter how challenging the economic conditions or how scarce the jobs are, our family ties and our relationship to the `aina or land, is intricately tied to the essence of our being.

Hawaii Island 21st Century Roadmap

The State of Hawaii is composed of islands in the Pacific Ocean. The nearest metropolitan population is located more than 2500 miles away. Hawaii depends on imported fossil fuels for more than 75% of its electricity generation¹ and imports 85 -90%² of its food. This means that the State of Hawaii currently imports more than two million meals per day. If the barges were to be stopped, Hawaii has approximately 2-3 weeks of fuel for electricity and 7 days of locally grown food.

Energy and food security, therefore, are key priorities for the people of Hawaii. The volatility in oil prices impact all aspects of commerce in Hawaii as the cost of importing items and the cost of electricity are factored into all products and services. These additional costs make it very difficult for any Hawaii-based business to be competitive with its counterparts on the continent and greatly impact the standard of living for individuals living in rural communities.

Given our geographic isolation coupled with our dependence on imports for vital needs such as electricity and food, Hawaii is on the precipice of a future that can be either very good or very bad. It can be very bad if we retain the status quo and fail to proactively address our energy and food security challenges.

On the other hand, Hawaii is blessed to have robust, renewable resources that can be utilized for electricity generation. On my island of Hawaii, we have geothermal, solar, wind, and hydropower resources that can be utilized to generate enough electricity to make our island completely energy self-sufficient. We also have abundant water resources and fertile soil that can revitalize a once vibrant agricultural industry. Whether we change our behavior and utilize these natural resources in a manner that meets our needs while preserving them for use by future generations is the key to whether we contribute to a

¹ *Renewable Energy in Hawaii June 2011*, Hawaii Economic Issues, Economic Report 2011, Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism, June 2011.

² *Food Self-Sufficiency in Hawaii, A Hawaii Department of Agriculture White Paper*, Hawaii Department of Agriculture, December 2008.

vibrant, thriving or depressed economic future on our island. Native Hawaiians play a vital role in shaping this future.

Many of us look back to our native *kupuna*, or elders, for guidance on how to move forward. The ancient Native Hawaiians were incredibly scientific people. They had identified the stars and constellations and used them for navigation across the Pacific Ocean. They had developed a calendar that dictated when to fish, when to plant and what to plant, so that their subsistence needs were met in abundance while still preserving Hawaii's precious natural resources. They had identified hundreds of thousands of species of plants and animals and had named, categorized and learned how to use them. Native Hawaiians worked comprehensively and collaboratively, using complex engineering methods to maximize the use of resources such as water for everything from agriculture to advanced forms of aquaculture.

As we look back to move forward, our native communities can see the vast opportunities available for the perpetuation of our native culture, language, practices, and traditions. We know that our elders were not so mired in tradition that they refused innovation. Our ancestors were incredibly intelligent and if they were here today, they would not hesitate to couple their incredible wisdom with today's technology to figure out how to sustain our population and be responsible stewards of the environment. As Hawaii is increasingly viewed as the "test bed" or "pilot" for energy and agricultural security, our native communities have become much more active and are certainly willing to be the "tip of the spear" that leads this fight for survival.

TiLeaf Group is just one of many partners involved in developing and implementing the *Hawai'i Island 21st Century Economy Roadmap*, a comprehensive plan that seeks to develop a viable, robust, and self-sufficient economy for Hawaii Island. The Roadmap has been developed by Rivertop Solutions, LLC over the past two years with the participation of key stakeholders on the island. It includes 29 projects, each with a viable business model and plan which allows the project to succeed on its own, and more importantly, to support the rest of the projects in the roadmap, thereby building a comprehensive, self-sufficient infrastructure on the island that yields economic success and community empowerment.

Addressing Agricultural Capacity on Hawaii Island

Many Hawaii farmers are struggling to compete with imported foods because of the high price of electricity. On my island of Hawaii, for example, we paid an electric rate of 40 cents per kilowatt hour in the month of April 2012 in comparison to the national average of 11 cents per kilowatt hour.³ If we want to increase our agricultural capacity, we need to find a way for farmers to be competitive with their counterparts on the continent.

A critically important facet of the *Hawaii Island 21st Century Economy Roadmap* is revitalizing Hawaii's agricultural capacity by (1) developing processes that lower input and processing costs, (2) increasing educational and apprenticeship programs that help

³ "April Electric Rates Up on All Islands Except One," *Star-Advertiser*, April 12, 2012.

transition individuals into farming, and (3) generating market demand through the commitment of large businesses, organizations, government agencies. It is essential that we are able to match market demand with increased agricultural capacity to ensure economic growth and to sustain progress.

Richard Ha, a Native Hawaiian Vietnam Veteran who owns and operates Hamakua Springs Farm, one of the more successful farming operations on Hawaii Island, summarizes the situation succinctly: *“The farmer will farm if the farmer can make money. If the farmer cannot make money, the farmer cannot farm.”* Given the volatility of oil prices and its devastating impact on Hawaii’s economy, Mr. Ha has focused on helping Hawaii to stabilize its electric generation prices by utilizing Hawaii’s robust renewable resources. He was motivated to actively help his community to address energy and food security following the spike in oil prices in 2008 which radically increased the cost of fuel, electricity, and fertilizer and caused his farm workers to ask him for loans to pay for gas to get to work.

The first pilot project from the *Hawaii Island 21st Century Economy Roadmap* is the Pu’ukapu Agricultural Community Facility which includes an anaerobic digester, post-harvest facility, and certified kitchen. The anaerobic digester will process organic waste to produce methane which will be utilized to generate electricity and soil amendments which will serve as low cost fertilizer. The electricity will power a Post-Harvest facility, complete with processing equipment and refrigeration. A certified kitchen will also be included in the facility to provide for the manufacture of value-added products such as sweet potato chips and tomato paste. The facility improves agricultural capacity by providing low-cost fertilizer and low-cost electricity which enables post-harvest processing by local farmers, which has traditionally been cost-prohibitive. Such post-harvest processing enables farmers to sell produce to larger markets, including the Department of Defense, University of Hawaii at Hilo, grocery stores and resorts.

This facility will be located on the Hawaiian Home Lands trust in Waimea, Hawaii. Congress created the Hawaiian Home Lands trust in 1921 via the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act which set aside approximately 200,000 acres for residential, agricultural, and pastoral homesteading by qualified Native Hawaiians. The trust lands are noncontiguous and are located on each of the islands. Each homestead community has a homestead community association, composed of lessees and family members, with democratically elected leadership.

The Pu’ukapu Community Agricultural Facility will be owned and operated by the Homestead Community Development Corporation (HCDC), a statewide nonprofit owned and operated by several homestead community associations on Kauai, Oahu, and Hawaii Island. The Waimea Hawaiian Homestead Association, which represents the homestead community in which this facility is located, will be the lead on managing this project for HCDC. Native Hawaiians, therefore, are not only participating, but managing and leading the way towards increased agricultural capacity and creating economic development and empowerment opportunities that simultaneously address food and energy security.

Veteran to Farmer Initiative

The Hawaii Veteran to Farmer Initiative can address not only Hawaii's food security challenges but also the growing food security challenges across the nation. The average age of a farmer in Hawaii is 60 years old and the U.S. average is similar. The United States Department of Agriculture has loan programs in place to aid the addition of 100,000 new farmers every year because in the next decade, half of the current farmers are expected to retire. Rebuilding the nation's ability to feed itself is a critical component of the strength of our country.

Young Veterans consistently have higher than average unemployment rates. Not only are their unemployment rates higher than average, but there are numerous other social and personal welfare indicators where Veterans and families of returning Veterans also rank higher than average such as substance abuse, homelessness, and domestic violence. These figures all show there is a need to better support the transition of Veterans from the areas of conflict where they served, back into civilian life.

There is a definite need to introduce a younger generation into agriculture careers with most of the U.S. farmers approaching retirement. Though only one sixth of the U.S. population is in rural communities, nearly 45% of the military comes from rural communities; so many Veterans have strong background knowledge of agriculture. Native Veterans represent the highest proportion of rural Veterans. Additionally, in Hawaii, four out of five of the individuals who identified themselves as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Veterans, were under the age of sixty-five, indicating a younger population of Veterans.

Horticulture has been used as a therapy tool for decades. Horticulture therapy is a proven method of reducing stress and anxiety, improving coping skills and motivation. It also promotes confidence and hopefulness among other qualities important for Veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries. In addition to providing a path to a career well-suited to re-integrating the Veterans, the Hawaii Veteran to Farmer initiative can provide a structure that includes routine monitoring by VA certified healthcare providers who will have routine contact with program participants, as needed, to ensure that treatment for physical and mental health of the Veterans and their families is on track.

The Hawaii Veteran to Farmer initiative provides: (1) a certificate level hands-on farming skills training curriculum, (2) classroom-based business training, (3) business start-up support, and (4) as-needed health monitoring and assessments for Veterans. A key goal of the program is to enable Veterans to develop the necessary skills and provide opportunities that utilize these skills in farming while acknowledging the difficulties many face in transitioning back to civilian life after military service. Completion can enable Veterans to both create new farm businesses, and to meet the requirements to acquire the leases and loans needed to start a farm.

The Hawaii Veteran to Farmer pilot program supports the Pu'ukapu Agricultural Community Facility because it increases the agricultural capacity that will be serviced by the facility. The program pilot begins in June 2012 and the first 12 participants include homesteaders who are Native Hawaiian Veterans and who have been granted agricultural leases within the Hawaiian Home Lands trust. The pilot will be completed in December 2012.

Each program participant will be provided the supplies necessary to build at least one greenhouse on their property. Participants will receive hands-on training on all aspects of farming from building the greenhouse to germination, drip-irrigation methods, and harvesting. They will also participate in an educational curriculum that focuses on the business aspects of successful farming including marketing, accounting, and business relations.

The hands-on training has been developed and will be taught by Mike Hodson, a Native Hawaiian homesteader who owns and operates a successful organic vegetable farm, WoW Farms, on his agricultural homestead. The educational curriculum is being developed in collaboration with the University of Hawaii system and agricultural industry. Classes for this pilot program will be held at a Native Hawaiian educational facility located in the homesteader community, thereby making access easy for program participants.

Each participant in the pilot program has committed to, upon completion, "paying it forward" by continuing to participate as instructors so that the model can grow exponentially. At the end of the pilot we will have 12 working farms. If each participant helps even just two additional Native Hawaiian Veteran homesteaders with the practical hands-on training, there could be 24 additional working farms within the next two years in this rural homestead community.

The pilot program will be used to refine and finalize the curriculum and to develop the required documentation to certify the program with various federal agencies. At least eight additional homestead communities have been identified by the State of Hawaii for participation in the program. While the pilot and its initial rollout focuses on participation by Native Hawaiian Veterans, non-native Veterans who have access to lands for farming or who seek to work on farms are eligible to participate. This is truly a community empowerment and community economic development model that can grow exponentially in a relatively short period to address our food security and economic development challenges in our rural communities.

This program involves many, many stakeholders throughout Hawaii. The Roadmap and the Pu'ukapu Agricultural Community Facility involve participation by Native Hawaiian leaders, Native Hawaiian organizations, State agencies and officials, Federal agencies and officials, County agencies and officials, and community-based organizations involved in food security, agricultural industry, energy security, economic development and workforce training. As we continue to progress, more interest is generated and we continue to expand the number of partners and collaborators in this project.

The fact that the tip of this spear to address food and energy security is being led by Native Hawaiian Veterans is not only symbolic, it just and it is right. This is a win-win situation where Native Hawaiian Veterans can lead the way in addressing critical needs in Hawaii while incorporating cultural and traditional practices, creating jobs, generating revenue, and creating additional opportunities for economic development and empowerment.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, as a Native Hawaiian Veteran, I thank you for all that you have done over your career to assist and empower Veterans, but in particular Native Veterans.

Your insight as a native Veteran has been invaluable in facilitating programs in recognition of the federal trust relationship between the United States and its native peoples. The establishment of the VA Native American Direct Loan program, for example, helped Native American Veterans to utilize the VA loans for homeownership on native lands. While there are additional barriers to increased participation in the program, the establishment of the VA Native American Direct Loan program serves as important precedent in demonstrating how federal programs can be modified to support the delivery of benefits and services to native Veterans living on native lands.

The definition of trust lands utilized since 1992 as part of the VA Native American Direct Loan program has continued to help native communities. The 2008 Farm bill codified this definition of trust lands as "Substantially Underserved Trust Areas" and authorized certain programs within the USDA's Rural Development program to issue low-interest loans and grants on these lands. This is a vitally important tool to economic development and empowerment on native lands. If this definition can be expanded to apply to other USDA and federal programs, it could greatly incentive private capital to invest in native communities and on projects on native lands.

Your unwavering support for the recognition of the accomplishments of native Veterans from the Navajo Code Talkers to the young Hawaiian men sent to colonize Baker, Jarvis, and Howland Islands to Medal of Honor recipients have served to memorialize the important contributions of native Veterans in defending and honoring our nation. We also greatly appreciate your efforts as a longstanding member, and as the Chairman of, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, in striving to maintain the commitment of the United States to its military members and Veterans, but especially the native Veterans.

As a beneficiary of the Montgomery GI Bill, you truly understand its value to Veterans and we applaud your accomplishments in strengthening the program to meet the needs of today's Veterans. Innovative programs like the Veteran to Farmer initiative can be successful because your insight, thereby resulting in economic development, community empowerment, jobs and food security in native and rural communities.