



[Only 34 Percent of Hawaiians Support Akaka Bill](#)

Human Events
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With President Bush no longer wielding a veto and a Hawaiian in the White House, Democrats would need to stumble badly to botch the passage of the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act. Fortunately for conservatives, that's exactly what's happening.

Better known as the Akaka Bill, the act would create a separate race-based government for indigenous Hawaiians. While critics view it as a noxious brew of racial pandering and political deal-making, the bill has for years enjoyed the solid support of Hawaii's ruling class, led by the congressional delegation, the governor and the state legislature.

In the days leading up to this week's House and Senate committee votes, however, Hawaii Democrats, with a big assist from the White House, threw their longstanding political coalition into chaos. They alienated the governor. They sparked a protest rally back in Honolulu. Democratic Sen. Daniel Inouye (Hi.), the delegation's elder statesman, was forced to admit twice in three days that he didn't know what was going on, but that he planned to find out.

The trouble started when the White House got involved. According to multiple accounts, the White House, the bill's chief sponsor Sen. Daniel Akaka (Hi.), and the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement privately crafted a series of amendments aimed at expanding and redefining the bill.

The revised bill immediately gives the proposed Native Hawaiian government inherent powers and privileges of self-determination, saying it would be "an Indian tribe." The original bill set up a procedure in which governing authority would be granted only after negotiations with the federal and state government.

Gov. Linda Lingle and Attorney General Mark Bennett, both Republicans, say they didn't learn of the revisions until late Tuesday, just hours before the bill was scheduled to go before the House Natural Resources Committee. That evening, they stunned the delegation by withdrawing their support.

"These changes are extensive, have been not part of any bill which we have supported, and have an enormous potential to negatively impact Hawaii and its citizens," said Mr. Bennett in a letter to the committee. "The views of Hawaii's citizens, native Hawaiian and non-Native Hawaiian alike, have not been heard (certainly not recently) with regard to this new model."

The next morning, Republican Rep. Doc Hastings (Wa.), the committee's ranking Republican, moved to postpone the vote for two months, saying more time was needed to review the extensive changes, and promised to keep lawmakers buried in procedural votes if they refused.

In legislative years, two months isn't long. But it's an eternity to Hawaii Rep. Neil Abercrombie (Hi.), the bill's House sponsor, who plans to leave Congress in the next few weeks to run for governor. Abercrombie badly wants to help make history by casting one of the votes that helps transform the bill into law.

His predicament left Hastings unmoved.

"This is a serious issue. I understand the gentleman is going to run for governor and going to resign . . . but this issue has been around for nine years," said Mr. Hastings, who added that he would vote against the bill in either form. "If there are issues that need to be resolved, I think the proper way is not to move something that has baggage."

Abercrombie compromised. He agreed to remove the amendments for purposes of the committee vote, although they could be added later in conference committee or on the House floor. That day, the House committee approved the bill 26-13.

The Senate Indian Affairs Committee muddied the waters further Thursday by passing the newly amended version of the Akaka Bill by voice vote. The move all but guarantees further turmoil as Hawaii Democrats attempt to reconcile the House and Senate versions.

"While there may have been recent misunderstandings and confusion about what we are doing here today. I want to reiterate that I spoke to Hawaii's Governor this morning and will continue to work with her, her Attorney General and our other valued partners," said Mr. Akaka.

Peppered by questions about the last-minute amendments, Inouye insisted in a statement he didn't know why the governor was kept in the dark.

"The events of the past 24 hours were totally unexpected. I was very surprised. I was not aware that the revisions to the bill being discussed between Senator Akaka's office and President Obama's administration were not shared with Governor Linda Lingle. I am in the process of trying to determine what happened and the best course forward," said Inouye.

The senator found himself in a similar jam Monday following reports that Democrats planned to stage a "sneak attack" by inserting the Akaka Bill into the Defense Appropriations bill, thus making it impracticable for Republicans to vote against it.

Those rumors prompted a protest in Honolulu by Akaka Bill opponents, who accused Democrats of orchestrating a "sneak attack." Inouye responded by insisting that the rumors were false and that "I don't know where this nonsensical suggestion originated."

"We have had hearings in Washington and in Hawaii," said Inouye. "It is not a measure that

has been shepherded in the dark of night. It has been fully transparent."

What's not fully transparent is the extent of the White House's involvement. If the Obama administration continues to push for a more expansive bill, it could upset the coalition's careful balance and trigger a backlash in Hawaii, where the bill isn't as popular as it is on Capitol Hill.

A Zogby International poll released Tuesday found that only 34 percent of Hawaiians support the Akaka Bill, while 51 percent oppose it and 15 percent aren't sure. Of those who do have an opinion, 60 percent are opposed.

A clear majority, 58 percent, want to see the state hold a referendum on the issue, while 28 percent are opposed to a vote and 13 percent aren't sure. The survey was conducted for the Grassroot[sic] Institute of Hawaii, a libertarian policy center that opposes the Akaka Bill.

"This poll shows that most of our local elected officials are out of touch with their constituents on this issue. This should be a wake-up call to each of them" said Grassroot Institute co-founder Richard Rowland. "According to the results, Hawaii's congressional delegation has been misleading their fellow senators and representatives about Hawaii public opinion on this issue."

Ironically, some of the bill's staunchest opponents are Native Hawaiians. Monday's protest wasn't staged by Republicans or conservatives, but by a coalition of Native Hawaiian sovereignty groups dedicated to defeating the Akaka Bill, which they call "a Hawaiian land grab."

Their concern is that the Akaka Bill will preempt their efforts to secede from the union and form the Kingdom of Hawaii in its place. It's unlikely such groups represent a majority of the state's estimated 240,000 Native Hawaiians, but they clearly include many of the most vocal ones.

"They hate the Akaka Bill worse than we do," said Andy Blum, president of Hawaiian Values.US, a Hawaii-based conservative group that opposes the Akaka Bill.

Foes of the Akaka Bill want a new set of state hearings on the issue--the last hearings took place seven years ago. Better yet, they want a referendum election, although the state legislature refuses to approve it. If the Democrats continue to bungle the bill in Congress, those calls will become harder to ignore.

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