

## The Politics of Statehood

William F. Quinn

My inauguration as last appointed Governor of the Territory of Hawaii took place on September 2, 1957. Statehood was uppermost in our minds. I said, on that day:

Statehood is a political and economic dream which must be fulfilled. The political climate is favorable. . . . we have the enthusiastic support of . . . President Eisenhower . . . [and] the Secretary of the Interior has wholeheartedly supported Hawaiian statehood. . . . My immediate predecessors in the office of Governor have energetically advanced the cause of statehood. I pledge my utmost efforts toward this goal.

Ironically, I also said:

The community question plagues our progress like a cur yapping at our heels. It is used as a reason for denial of statehood. . . .

I say this latter statement was irony because six weeks later Dr. Lyle Phillips spoke in Pittsburgh to the effect that Hawaii was in the grip of the communists and that red unions controlled Hawaii economically and politically. Imua subsequently endorsed this speech which I characterized as "unfair and erroneous." Two months later Congressman John Pillian said in a nationwide telecast that Quinn was soft on communism. The charge of communist control remained the most commonly used weapon against statehood right up to the passage of the statehood bill.

These comments were a slight diversion from my thesis—the political maneuvering that shrouded the fate of the statehood bill in mystery.

A month after the inauguration, Delegate John Burns and I met with the Statehood Commission on Maui to drum up support for

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*William F. Quinn, the first elected Governor of the State of Hawaii in 1959, presented this essay as a speech to the Social Science Association, Honolulu. The essay cannot be reprinted without permission of the author and the Association.*

H.B. 49, the bill that would make Hawaii the 49th state. Hawaii had been brought to the brink so often that many of our people thought statehood would be forever denied. Under such circumstances, it was hard to maintain enthusiastic support for the concept year after year.

It was on the Maui trip that Delegate Burns predicted that Alaska would get statehood in the ensuing Congressional term. Alaska had come a long way, for in earlier Congresses, Alaska had been considered not ready for consideration as a state because of oversize, underpopulation, and lack of wealth. It was widely thought that Alaska would be an enormous drain on the Federal treasury.

However, by 1958, Alaska had adopted the Tennessee plan which called for the Territory to elect "Senators" as though it were a state. Alaska had elected two highly respected democrats, Ernest Gruening and Bob Bartlett, which pleased the majority in the Senate. In addition, Alaska did not have the virulent opposition which openly opposed Hawaii for alleged communist taint and covertly for racial reasons.

By November 1, President Eisenhower had announced his support for Alaskan statehood. This, together with the approval of the new civil rights act, led many statehood advocates to believe the road to statehood had been opened. The opposition to a state not contiguous with the other 48 seemed to be diminishing. From the political standpoint, it was clear that Hawaii was a bipartisan jurisdiction so partisan political opposition did not seem appropriate.

Shortly after the turn of the year, word came back from Washington that passage of the Hawaiian statehood bill was unlikely in the current session.

Things were quiet for almost two months as Congress got organized and into the business of the new session.

On February 27, the Governors of the eleven Western states in their Conference endorsed statehood for Alaska and Hawaii. Under questioning at a press conference, I said that hopes for Alaskan statehood were high and that if the Hawaii bill were allowed to get to the floor, it would pass.

Ten days later, speaking on statehood to a large Chicago audience, I predicted that if Alaska passed, Hawaii would receive favorable consideration.

At this time, those of us active in pressing for statehood were in agreement that we should vigorously oppose all attempts to join the Alaska and Hawaii bills. Although there was some indication that

Minority leaders Knowland in the Senate and Martin in the House wanted to join the bills, many of us Republicans worked hard to prevent such a move, and with the help of the administration and a great deal of personal lobbying, this was accomplished. Knowland and Martin and many Republicans believed that Hawaii had a chance to send Republicans to the Senate while they knew very well that Alaska would not. Our fear was that joinder of the bills would consolidate all the forces against each of them and bring about the defeat of both.

On June 3, the House passed the Alaska bill and sent it to the Senate. On that day there was a meeting of the Hawaii Statehood Commission with political leaders of both parties.

In response to a question from Bob Cates, Oahu democratic chairman, I told him there was no agreement to defer Hawaii, and that the movement of Alaska and immobility of the Hawaii bill was merely a matter of position on the House calendar. Our immediate concern was to keep the bills separate. And here I quote: "We have been assured of immediate subsequent consideration of Hawaii."

At this meeting it was reported for the first time that the House leadership was talking about deferring the Hawaii bill until the next year.

This caused considerable consternation. Also, for the first time, the statehood supporters began to divide along partisan lines. The Delegate's message was that Alaska was essential so don't interfere.

The Republican chairman, O. P. Soares, urged that a delegation go to Washington immediately to find out why Hawaii was being held back. Garner Anthony agreed, provided there was no direct opposition from Burns. Former U. H. President Gregg Sinclair suggested we try to telephone since we didn't have enough information. Democratic chairman Bill Richardson though our friends might be playing their tactics by ear and that maybe we'd have to wait. He suggested that the Governor go to Washington to drum up administration support for the Alaska bill. After an exhaustive discussion the motion to send a delegation to Washington was tabled pending clarification of the situation.

The only reason given for delaying Hawaii was that joinder with the Alaska bill should be avoided. This did not make sense to many of us, including some of the democrats, because there was a Hawaii bill pending in the Senate that could be joined to Alaska any time there were the votes to do it. Meanwhile the House had passed the Alaska bill, but the Hawaii bill was still languishing in Committee.

On June 5, a democratic Congressman from Oregon, Charlie Porter, an old friend and classmate of mine, made a statement which he attributed to me that asking for immediate consideration of Hawaii after Alaska would be tantamount to killing both bills. I took strong issue with that statement which I said, striking a partisan note, appeared to be a Democrat point of view. At the same time, I disassociated myself from what I said was Burns' position that Alaska should move and Hawaii not move in the current year.

My hope was that passage of the Alaska bill would give Hawaii enormous momentum for immediate passage. My fear was that the Hawaii bill would get bogged down in a subsequent session with all civil rights opponents fighting to keep two more liberals out of the Senate. Everyone knew that Hawaii's Senators, irrespective of party, would be liberal on civil rights issues.

A few days later, the Senate committee acted favorably on the Alaska bill. The Statehood Commission met on June 6 still trying to fathom why statehood supporters were shifting from their support for "statehood now."

Senior statesman, democrat Billy Heen, complained that delaying Hawaii until Alaska passed would leave no time for Hawaii. Gruening of Alaska advised the Commission that it should withdraw from the current session, predicting that the chances would be excellent for Hawaii in the next session.

Along with the Statehood Commissioners, I was totally confused as to why a strategy was being followed which would deprive us of an historic opportunity.

Striking another partisan stance, I told a Republican convention that the Delegate had favored a "dark compromise" of pushing Alaska and abandoning Hawaii.

Bill Richardson struck back. Quinn is injecting partisanship into the statehood issue.

Then on July 1, the Alaskan statehood bill was approved. Local leaders in the statehood fight were all optimistic for immediate action. Significantly, Richardson, Patsy Mink, and Jack Hall all urged that the bill wait until the next session.

Ike asked for immediate statehood for Hawaii. Secretary Seaton announced he would press urgently for passage this session. Leading Republican senators announced their support. Knowland predicted the bill would pass if given a chance but noted there was no enthusiasm on the part of the Senate leadership to call the bill up.

The issue now had taken on partisanship colors on the national

scene. Events began to move very rapidly. Secretary Seaton called me to come to Washington. "But not with the Statehood Commission. Thurston in particular is too neuter. Bring some good strong effective Republicans." Although I demurred, I eventually agreed. But how could I meet his specifications, do the best job for our cause, and not further split our local efforts? I met with the Statehood Commission. Burns advised that if the issue were forced, it might jeopardize the statehood bill in the next session. Senator Vincent Esposito, just back from observing all the Alaskan hearings, claimed the chances for statehood were terrific if we could get Speaker Sam Rayburn's support. Jan Jabulka, Commission executive, urged from Washington that the Commission push the Senate bill. The Commission decided to make a major effort to get the bill passed. I informed the Commission that I wanted to go ahead of the Commission delegation to do some fact finding and be an advance mission for the whole delegation. I named former delegates (and Republicans) Samuel Wilder King and Betty Farrington to go with me to make a first hand appraisal of our chances. As former delegates, they had Washington experience and access to the floor of the House so their efforts could only be constructive. As it happened, I had also met Seaton's partisan requirements.

Meanwhile, Congressman Leo O'Brien, chairman of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, who earlier had appeared to acquiesce in the strategy of delay, assured us that if we could move the bill in the Senate, he and other supporters would "break their backs" in the House.

Enthusiasm began to mount here at home. There was talk of mass demonstrations for immediate action. U. H. President Laurance Snyder promised the University would throw its weight behind the big push, saying that delay was "preposterous."

The weekend of July 4 gave my three-person delegation time within which to make plans on how to assess our chances in the current session.

Delegate Burns was quick to spot the partisan tinge of the Quinn delegation and to charge that we were making a political issue out of statehood. He warned that such moves might adversely affect our long-term efforts.

Our delegation was joined within the week by six members of the Statehood Commission. We then had a nine-member bipartisan delegation. We met every morning to plan the day's lobbying to make certain that we reached the right people in the Senate and the

House. From the reports of our members, it was clear that the bill would pass in both houses if it were given a chance. It was also apparent that the leadership in both houses was loathe to call the bills up.

At home, the local press continued to back our efforts. The *Star-Bulletin* reassured the public that Hawaii could follow Seaton's advice with confidence because he was largely responsible for the upturn in Alaska's fortunes. Meanwhile, Seaton was urging our delegation to stay on and fight. He pointed out that many pieces of important legislation had gone through in less time than the time remaining in the session.

However, Delegate Burns told Speaker Elmer Cravalho that the partisan Quinn delegation would do great harm to Hawaii's chances in the next session. He asked that efforts be made to bring the delegation home. In response, the Maui democratic party sent a message urging us to come home before we endangered our future chances for Statehood.

The impasse was such that it began to get thoughtful attention from the press. The Congressional Quarterly gave three succinct reasons why they predicted the bill would not pass in 1958:

1. Democratic leaders were opposed to the bill despite the endorsement of it in the democratic platform.
2. It was so late in the session that taking up Hawaii would shove aside other bills worth a lot more votes to the members.
3. Delegate Burns doesn't want statehood this year.

The UPI wrote an indepth analysis, leading off by saying that the refusal of the democrat-controlled Congress to consider statehood in the current session was bringing about a tug of war in Hawaii and on the mainland. It remarked that despite the President's prodding, the leadership had indicated there would be no consideration this year. Ike called it "rank discrimination."

UPI said that Congressional observers could not pinpoint the reason for the "brush off."

It was reported that Washington observers saw politics behind the big ballyhoo in the wake of the passage of the Alaska bill. It was a quickie, spearheaded by Interior to try to put the blame on the democrats for failure of Hawaii to be admitted with Alaska. It was predicted that the Quinn delegation of Republicans would go home without any action but with plenty of ammunition.

Several reasons were speculated upon for the leadership's action. UPI said it had national political overtones. Southerners don't want more liberals in the Senate. The islands are in a communist stranglehold. Although Quinn dismissed this charge as nonsense, the earlier Eastland report was a real obstacle. A committee hearing between sessions might dispel the influence of this report.

Finally, it was thought that Lyndon Johnson didn't want to waste time on debate without assurance the bill would become law.

The political controversy heated up. In the last week of July, Oahu democrats claimed that I went to Washington to help Seaton further his career and had committed my support in the 1960 convention. The GOP turned around and charged Delegate Burns with conspiring to cheat people out of a golden opportunity to get immediate statehood.

By this time the Statehood Commission had collected about 1,500 editorials from around the country urging immediate statehood for Hawaii. *Life* magazine had a centerfold editorial "Welekahao" urging immediate statehood. " 'Wait 'til next year' is no longer good enough," said *Life*. "We wish the Quinn delegation luck."

Our delegation—the bipartisan one including Statehood commissioners—was at the end of its rope. Despite the friendly, even enthusiastic reception we received from both sides of the aisle, and the public clamor for action, we were completely stymied by a leadership we hadn't been able to see.

As a last desperate measure, I agreed to use the offices of an old friend of mine, a leading democrat and long time close associate of the majority leader's—Johnson. I asked my friend Jim Rowe if he could possibly get me an appointment with Johnson. He agreed to try. I urged him to tell Johnson I wasn't such a bad sort even if I was a Republican.

Jim was able to get the appointment: 6:30 p.m. the next night.

Bobby Baker met me when I arrived a few minutes early. He seated me in the Senator's waiting room and said that the Senator was still in the Senate and might be delayed.

At 8:30 the Senator strode in, and I was ushered into his office shortly thereafter. I had a copy of the *Life* magazine under my arm.

We exchanged a few pleasantries. He said that Jim Rowe had told him I wasn't such a bad guy. Then I told him I had come to enlist his powerful aid to move the Hawaii bill through Congress. He seemed somewhat annoyed. He pointed to a white phone on his desk and said, "See that telephone, that phone is to *your* President. *Your*

President has a lot of bills he wants to get through this Senate and I'm helping him do it, and we don't have time for *your* bill."

I felt I had to see the subject to its conclusion. I said, "Senator, the whole country is behind statehood now. There are hundreds of editorials throughout the country this week supporting it." And I opened my *Life* magazine and said, "Here's the lead editorial in *Life* magazine . . ." and he cut me off. We were seated perhaps four feet apart. He leaned forward until his face was inches from mine. His voice rose, his face turned red, cords stood out in his neck and he shouted, "Listen, young man, no one tells me how to run this Senate, not you, not *your* President, not *Life* magazine; that bill will be considered only when and if I want it considered, understand?"

Well, I understood all right. I was taken aback. I didn't know how to respond. I got to my feet, thanked him for the audience, and as I reached the door I asked him if he could make some public pronouncement that statehood for Hawaii would be brought up and passed in the next session. His fury had subsided, and he simply made some offhand non-reassuring remark.

That was the end of our efforts in 1958. We left Washington expressing ourselves as encouraged and determined to lay the groundwork for the next year.

In a press conference I told the reporters that we must have a delegation in Washington when the session convened in 1959. We had made a lot of friends. We must keep the pressure up between July and January.

The press tried to get me to attack Burns and actually remarked in the news story that I refused to do so. Instead, I gave my opinion that while he was an obstacle, he was acting in accordance with the decision of his party. He thought we should press for passage of the bill at the right time but this was not it.

Both Lorrin Thurston, chairman of the Commission, and I expressed the view that a strong effort would be required in the next session, and that the road to success was covered with pitfalls.

The political campaign started. Burns was running for delegate. Contrary to the expectations of many, I didn't try to use his failure to press for statehood against him. The closest I came to taking such a position was when I said in mid-August that Burns faced a dilemma: either press for immediate statehood or go along with the democratic leadership.

I did give expression to the question that was uppermost in my mind then and which remains unanswered after all these years.

Why couldn't Hawaii have been considered immediately after the Alaska bill had been passed and sent to the White House? Why had Delegate Burns and I had identical positions about Alaska first and Hawaii immediately after in February and then such antagonistic positions in June?

I have pondered these questions for many years without ever coming to any answers. The occasion to discuss the questions frankly with Jack Burns never presented itself.

Just six weeks ago a document came into my possession which casts some illumination on the questions although it does not free the subject from all ambiguity.

Jan Jabulka, former reporter and writer, was the executive secretary of the Hawaiian Statehood Commission in its last years. Jan died in February of 1980. After his death, a document was delivered to me pursuant to Jan's instructions. It was a letter dated April 22, 1958 from Delegate Burns to Oren Long, former territorial Governor and member of the Statehood Commission. Oren was one of the two U. S. Senators elected in the first statehood election.

In this nine-page letter, Burns responds to four letters received from Long. Because I do not wish to try to interpret Burns' thoughts lest I be guilty of adding some coloration, I want to quote excerpts of the letter. These will be taken out of context and therefore may be suspect, but I assure you I have endeavored to quote the entire thought expressed in the excerpted parts of the letter.

Senator Johnson is the manager of the business of the Senate. His own position is immaterial. In my judgment, he will vote along with Speaker Sam Rayburn. Save possibly for exceptional situations, he is going to be voting with the majority since he would not have brought the bill up unless he thought he had a majority. . . . Speaker Sam Rayburn has been very kind to me personally. He is inclined to be opposed to Statehood for very definite and sufficient reasons to himself. However, he will not take a position hurting me with my voters. It is my belief, upon good sufficient reason, that he will support Hawaii when Alaska is through. In this regard, I might say that his support would be for both, but he mistrusts the Administration.

When the President has signed the Alaska bill, it is my opinion that he will be convinced that they cannot then pull a political shenanigan. In my opinion also, some reason exists for doubting that the administration, if it had both bills—Alaska and Hawaii—before it, they would then sign both bills. I might point out in this that in anything I tell you, I would rather not be quoted as Jack Burns told me this.

The foregoing explains that it was political distrust of the Eisenhower administration that caused Rayburn and Johnson to refuse to allow the Hawaii bill to move at all until after the Alaska bill was signed. However, it does not cast any light on why the Hawaii bill was not permitted to go forward in the last month of the 1958 session.

## Continuing with the letter:

... if we are going to obtain an elective Governor we are going to have to abandon Statehood for awhile. How long is a question of time? It is my judgment that we would be able to make a better fight for Statehood with an elected Governor than we are doing at the present time. . . . In a sense, you would, by obtaining an elected Governor, close the book on Statehood for Hawaii. Further progress would then have to be made after a regrouping and a new attack toward that objective. However, I think we must recognize that the people of Hawaii, in the great majority, do not believe that we are *ever* going to obtain statehood. While the reasons for our believing this are not entirely correct, since they are convinced it is because of their racial background, they do have an entirely understandable conviction in the matter. . . .

As I consider the Statehood picture in its totality—it must be considered that way—I am astonished that Hawaii is as far advanced as she is.

... I was impressed with the fact that some of the Members there who have gone before occasions of which I have record voted for Statehood, are among our best opponents. One Member is marked down as having voted favorably for Statehood in 1947, 1950, 1953 and 1955, yet in the privacy of a Committee room, he was the one that actually put off Statehood here a couple of months ago.

... In my opinion, we could do a lot more for ourselves by the general public of Hawaii having the true picture so that rather than blaming the Congress, they will blame themselves for failure to have obtained Statehood.

One of the Congressmen . . . engaged me in conversation. As frequently happens, the suggestion of Statehood was mentioned. This Congressman . . . informed me . . . that Hawaii was in a position similar to the District of Columbia, that is, that people come into the District Committee, testify strongly and vigorously for Home Rule, then privately tell the Members . . . that Home Rule was out of the question. Naturally, the Members of the District Committee have never favorably reported on any Home Rule measure. This affects the Hawaii issue since our conversations with Members find the stories are somewhat similar.

... those of the Big 5 who say they are supporting Statehood should, to make their support effective, recant their former positions. This they can only do by admitting their former position and presenting it, as well as their new position and reasoning, to those to whom they gave their former positions privately. The new position will not have much weight on those who received the former position.

Reading this over, it strikes me that Jack Burns believed in April 1958 that a bill for Statehood for Hawaii could not pass irrespective of how the Alaska bill fared.

One last series of excerpts from the letter casts Delegate Burns' strategy to support the passage of a statehood bill in a new light.

I should mention that I have not made an effort to convince anyone as to Statehood.

Not a single member of Congress has been approached by me on the matter. However, a great number on both sides of the aisle have talked to me about it. The fact that I do not bring it up to them causes them to mention it to me and to ask questions about it. This then affords me an opportunity to meet their questions and then to proceed further in convincing them. . . .

Had I the experience I now have in the Congress and the position I now occupy among the people of Hawaii—I say this in real humility—when I started this Congress on January 3, 1957, I would not introduce a bill for Statehood. I would introduce an elective Governor bill. I would then do the familiar trick of being for my bill publicly and letting it not go through. Nor would I let Hawaiian Statehood go through.

In my judgment, as a consequence of that, Alaskan statehood would be able to get through. However, we cannot change that which is done. That which I mentioned earlier about the Speaker and Lyndon Johnson, as well as my own good sense, will have me working like heck for Alaska and being for Hawaii so as to develop every possible good will but not contributing to it by a means of killing both.

Jan sent a short note to me with the letter. He said, "Jack was always an elected governor advocate under the status quo." My opinion differs. I believe Jack Burns was strongly in favor of statehood for Hawaii. I don't think he foresaw the actual support the bill had in both houses of Congress. He certainly felt that he should embrace any strategy drawn by Rayburn and Johnson. In April 1958 he may have really preferred that Hawaii simply obtain the right to elect its own Governor. On the other hand, he may have thought that an elected Governor bill would give Alaska a better shot and therefore benefit Hawaiian statehood in the long run.

The letter does not answer the question why the leadership refused to bow to the enormous pressure from the public and the administration to pass the Hawaii bill in the closing weeks of the 1958 session. Perhaps the real answer was that Johnson didn't think the Senate had time to consider the bill.

#### EPILOGUE

On March 19, 1959 I received a call from Secretary Seaton asking that I come to Washington immediately because the bill was beginning to move in the Senate and the Administration wanted as much help on hand as possible.

I arrived in Washington after dark on the 11th. George Abbott, General Counsel of the Department of the Interior, met me at the gate, took me by the arm and hurried me to a waiting car. "Leave your baggage," he said, "we'll get it later." We drove at breakneck speed to the old Senate Office Building and rushed to the old Supreme Court room. There was no one there. But there were several microphones and a number of klieg lights. We were there only a moment when several press people rushed in, the lights went on, and there was the hubbub of a sizeable group approaching down the corridor. In came Senator Jackson, flanked by Delegate Burns and Delores Martin, Hawaii Democratic National Committeewoman, and a number of Democratic Senators. The Hawaii bill had just passed the Senate and this was to be the news conference. Delores spotted me, ran up and gave me a big kiss, cameras clicked, and this was the picture that flashed around the country.

Ironically, when the bill came up for debate that day, southern Senators such as Richard Russell were prepared to make lengthy talks against Hawaiian statehood even though the votes for passage were there. *Life* magazine told the story. As each Senator rose to speak, Lyndon Johnson went over and said something to him. The Senator nodded, folded his manuscript, and sat down. *Life* learned that what Johnson had said was something like this: "Put it away and we'll print it in the record. That young S.O.B. Republican Governor from Hawaii is on his way now and I want to get this bill through before he gets here."

The vote was almost completed when I landed. Interior was determined there would be a Republican presence when final passage was achieved. They succeeded, and the picture that told the story to the American people was a perfect show of bipartisan harmony.