

Undated: Indian Affairs Committee Speeches (2 of 3): Alaskan native peoples and the struggle to survive

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers
Speeches, Undated, Box SP1, Folder 18
<https://hdl.handle.net/10524/71500>

Items in eVols are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated.

UHM Library Digital Collections Disclaimer and Copyright Information

9-9-99

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE
VICE CHAIRMAN
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
SEPTEMBER 9, 1999 FORUM
SPONSORED BY
THE
ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES
ON
ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLES
THE STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE**

I THANK MY GOOD FRIEND FROM ALASKA FOR HIS KIND WORDS.

**I AM TRULY HONORED TO HAVE BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE
IN THIS IMPORTANT FORUM ON THE SURVIVAL OF THE ALASKA
NATIVE PEOPLE.**

**WHILE IT IS NOT THE CUSTOM OR THE PRACTICE OF MEMBERS
OF THE SENATE TO CONCERN THEMSELVES WITH MATTERS THAT
AFFECT ANOTHER STATE, IN THIS INSTANCE, MY INTEREST ARISES
NOT ONLY OUT OF THE FACT THAT MY BEST FRIEND IN THE SENATE
HAPPENS TO BE FROM ALASKA, BUT ALSO OUT OF MY SERVICE ON THE
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS FOR THE PAST TWENTY-ONE YEARS.**

**OVER THE COURSE OF THAT TIME, I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE
OF TRAVELING TO ALASKA ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, AND THE UNIQUE
OPPORTUNITY THAT NO OTHER CHAIRMAN OF THE INDIAN AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE HAS HAD — TO TRAVEL TO SOME OF THE MORE REMOTE
NATIVE VILLAGES IN OUR FORTY-NINTH STATE.**

**SADLY, I KNOW THAT TOO MANY OF OUR COLLEAGUES IN THE
CONGRESS HAVE ONLY A PASSING FAMILIARITY, IF AT ALL, WITH
WHAT WE MEAN BY SUBSISTENCE.**

**SUBSISTENCE IS A WORD THAT MANY PEOPLE USE WITHOUT
REALLY KNOWING WHAT IT MEANS TO THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF THIS
LAND.**

MOST AMERICANS, I WOULD VENTURE TO GUESS, WOULD THINK THAT SUBSISTENCE MEANS BASIC SURVIVAL — OR PUT ANOTHER WAY, ENOUGH FOOD TO KEEP ONE ALIVE.

IF YOU ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH THE WAYS OF NATIVE PEOPLE, YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW THAT SUBSISTENCE IS MORE THAN JUST SIMPLE SUSTENANCE -- IT IS A WAY OF LIFE.

THE GATHERING AND HARVESTING OF NATURAL RESOURCES BY THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF THIS NATION HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

SUBSISTENCE IS SO MUCH A PART OF THE FABRIC OF NATIVE EXISTENCE, THAT WITHOUT IT, THERE WOULD BE NO CULTURE, NO TRADITION, PERHAPS NO COMMUNITY — AND CERTAINLY, NO MEANS OF GIVING EXPRESSION TO THE SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF NATIVE LIFE.

THOSE OF US WHO SERVE IN THE SENATE AND ARE INVOLVED IN THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS ARE WELL AWARE OF THE ONGOING STRUGGLE IN THE STATE OF ALASKA TO ADDRESS THE SUBSISTENCE PROVISIONS OF THE ALASKA NATIONAL INTEREST LANDS CONSERVATION ACT.

IN HAWAII, OUR SITUATION IS DIFFERENT.

THE RIGHTS OF THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF HAWAII TO HUNT, FISH AND GATHER FOR SUBSISTENCE PURPOSES, AND TO PRACTICE THE TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS OF THEIR CULTURE HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED IN THE LAWS OF HAWAII FROM THE EARLIEST OF TIMES.

OUR STATE CONSTITUTION SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSES NATIVE SUBSISTENCE RIGHTS, AND EXTENDS PROTECTIONS OF THESE RIGHTS EXCLUSIVELY FOR NATIVE HAWAIIANS.

BUT WE HAVE NOT ALWAYS BEEN SO ENLIGHTENED.

THERE WAS A TIME IN OUR HISTORY WHEN WE DID VERY LITTLE TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF FOREIGN DISEASES WHICH ULTIMATELY DECIMATED THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF HAWAII.

WE DID NOT ACT WHEN THE NATIVE PEOPLE WERE BEING DRIVEN FROM THEIR LANDS BY ECONOMIC FORCES THAT THEY ALONE COULD NOT OVERCOME.

WE DID NOTHING TO STOP THE ILLEGAL OVERTHROW OF THE NATIVE HAWAIIAN GOVERNMENT, NOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EXPRESSION BY THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF THEIR SOVEREIGNTY.

IT WASN'T UNTIL THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF HAWAII WERE DECLARED TO BE A "DYING RACE" THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT STEPPED IN TO SET ASIDE LANDS IN WHAT WAS THEN THE TERRITORY OF HAWAII FOR THEIR BENEFIT.

EVEN THEN, WE LOOKED THE OTHER WAY WHEN THE MISSIONARIES CAME TO HAWAII AND CONCLUDED THAT THE CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS OF THE NATIVE PEOPLE WERE PRIMITIVE AND UNCIVILIZED.

WHEN THE SPEAKING OF THE NATIVE LANGUAGE WAS BANNED, WE DID NOT STAND IN THE WAY.

WHEN THE ANCIENT CHANTS THAT SERVED AS THE ORAL RECORDS OF GENEALOGY AND HISTORY WERE PROHIBITED, AND THE BEAUTIFUL HULA DANCES THAT WERE THE EXPRESSION OF STORIES PASSED DOWN FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT WERE ALSO FORBIDDEN, WE DID NOT ACT.

BUT EVENTUALLY, THERE CAME A TIME WHEN THE CITIZENS OF HAWAII CAME TOGETHER TO BRING AN END TO THESE CONDITIONS.

THEY REALIZED THAT THE CULTURE, TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS OF THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF HAWAII WERE AND ARE WHAT MAKES HAWAII THE SPECIAL PLACE THAT IT IS AND WHAT DRAWS MILLIONS OF VISITORS TO OUR ISLANDS EACH YEAR.

THEY COULD HAVE PASSED LAWS, BUT LAWS COULD BE REPEALED.

SO, IN 1978, THE CITIZENS OF HAWAII CONVENED A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION AND PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

THE STATE'S CONSTITUTION THAT WERE ADOPTED IN A STATEWIDE REFERENDUM.

TODAY, THERE IS LITTLE IN HAWAII THAT DOES NOT BEAR THE IMPRIMATUR OF NATIVE HAWAIIANA.

BY LAW, THE NATIVE HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE IS ONE OF THE TWO OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE STATE.

BY LAW, THE STREETS HAVE NATIVE HAWAIIAN NAMES. OUR STATEWIDE HOLIDAYS COMMEMORATE THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF GREAT NATIVE HAWAIIAN LEADERS AND KINGS.

NATIVE LANGUAGE SPEAKING HAS BEEN REVITALIZED.

THE NATIVE HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE IS TAUGHT IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AND WE HAVE SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN WHICH INSTRUCTION IS CONDUCTED EXCLUSIVELY IN THE HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE FROM KINDERGARTEN THROUGH THE TWELFTH GRADE.

WE NOW EVEN HAVE UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULA AND TEACHER TRAINING IN THE NATIVE HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE.

"ALOHA" AND THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORD HAS BECOME PART OF OUR WAY OF LIFE.

TO SOME IT MAY SOUND LIKE A TOURIST PHRASE, BUT FOR MOST OF US IN HAWAII, ALOHA IS SOMETHING REAL - THE SPIRIT OF UNDERSTANDING, THE SPIRIT OF TOLERANCE, THE SPIRIT OF LOVE.

THE CITIZENS OF OTHER STATES HAVE RESPONDED IN SIMILAR FASHION TO THE CONDITIONS OF THE NATIVE PEOPLE.

IN ARIZONA AND CALIFORNIA, THE CITIZENS SPOKE THROUGH STATEWIDE REFERENDA TO AUTHORIZE WHAT THEIR LEGISLATORS LACKED THE POLITICAL WILL TO ACCOMPLISH.

THROUGH TREATIES, THE UNITED STATES RECOGNIZES THE RIGHTS OF THE NATIVE PEOPLE TO HUNT, AND FISH, AND GATHER FOR SUBSISTENCE PURPOSES.

WE CAN SEE THIS HAPPENING AT ALL LEVELS — A COMING TOGETHER OF DIVERSE INTERESTS TO RECOGNIZE THE RIGHTS OF THE NATIVE PEOPLE — NOT ONLY TO SURVIVE, BUT TO CONTINUE THE SUBSISTENCE WAY OF LIFE THAT HAS BEEN PASSED DOWN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION — FOR HUNDREDS, IF NOT THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

PERHAPS BECAUSE WE ARE AN INSULAR COMMUNITY, THOSE OF US WHO WERE BORN AND RAISED IN HAWAII KNOW THAT THE FUTURE OF OUR ISLANDS AS A HEALTHY, SAFE AND PRODUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT DEPENDS IN LARGE MEASURE ON OUR COMMITMENT TO HELP ONE ANOTHER.

NEWCOMERS TO OUR ISLANDS SOON LEARN THE WAYS OF THE NATIVE PEOPLE AND A CULTURE THAT PLACES A HIGHER PRIORITY ON COOPERATION THAN COMPETITION - AND THAT WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

I WOULD HOPE THAT THIS SEMINAR TODAY WILL GIVE EACH OF US A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF HOW WE CAN BEST HELP OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS — THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF ALASKA.

2309

278

907