

Red Hill Water Accountability Initiative Act remarks

Congressman Kaiuli'i Kahele Papers

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REP KAI KAHELE Red Hill WAI Act Remarks
Hawai'i State Capitol
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Aloha awakea kākou.

Thank you all for being here. I want to thank my friend and colleague, Representative Ed Case for being here today as well. I want to thank the Governor of the State of Hawaii, the Mayor of the City and County of Honolulu, the Speaker of the House and our elected leaders of the Legislature and the City Council and especially Ernie Lau of the Board of Water Supply.

Collectively and united, we are here today to announce that early this morning in Washington DC in the US House of Representatives, in the people's House, that Representative Ed Case and I have introduced Federal Legislation titled:

The "Red Hill Water Accountability Initiative Act" otherwise known as the "Red Hill WAI Act"

This bill discontinues all fuel operations at Red Hill, defuels the Red Hill storage tanks by the end of 2022, and permanently closes the facilities in accordance with the best practices recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The bill also reimburses costs incurred by the State and County, specifically the Board of Water Supply, Department of Health, and Department of Education.

The bill also requires the establishment of a permanent water treatment facility and a water quality testing facility by the US Navy.

Our community has been through a lot in the last 2 years. In 2020, almost exactly two years ago, history changed course when the COVID-19 pandemic began to sweep the globe. Hawai'i was particularly hard hit - and recovering from COVID-19 remains a challenge today.

It's been hard and exhausting. People are at their breaking points. Despite that, our island community did what we always do when times get rough: we've rallied.

But in November 2021, Hawaii families were hit again.

Despite repeated assurances that our drinking water was safe and clean, military and civilian families were told to stop using their water following an accidental release of fuel from Red Hill.

This was water they had been cooking with, bathing with, giving to their children, their family members, their pets.

This was water they used to make their Thanksgiving meals on November 25th, a day when families gather, give thanks, and share in fellowship.

While military and civilian families were enjoying the long Thanksgiving weekend, reports started coming in that military families, civilians & their pets on the military water supply system were falling horribly ill.

It would not be until the evening of Sunday, November 28, three days after Thanksgiving, that the Navy would quietly remove the Red Hill well from the Navy's Water System. But they made a reprehensible mistake, they failed to let anyone know.

They failed to let Army Lt. Steve and Amy Faisst know that the bathwater they were bathing their newborn daughter, 3 month old Kaia in their home in Hailsey Terrace was contaminated with jet fuel.

But, Little Kaia would let them know in the early morning hours with her screams described by her mother as something she had never heard before. Kaia was in her crib, the room was dark and it was not until she turned on the light and removed Kaia's onesie that to her horror she saw her daughter covered in a rash. Amy immediately called her doctor who sent Kaia to Kapiolani but when allergy tests came back negative they couldn't figure out what was wrong, until that evening via Facebook when hundreds of families in Hailsey Terrace were reported that the water coming out of their faucets in their homes wreaked of fuel. It was then Amy and Steve realized that it wasn't an allergic reaction, it was the water.

Kaia's doctor would later confirm with Steve and Amy that their daughter, at just 3 months old, had suffered chemical burns to her body.

This week, Army Major Amanda Feindt and Navy spouse Jamie Simic traveled to Washington D.C. to take their message to military leadership. Major Feindt said, "I'm here as a mother of two children who were poisoned on American soil by an American asset."

Stars and Stripes, a military publication, wrote the following:

"Feindt and her 4-year-old daughter ended up in a hospital emergency room in December, suffering from uncontrollable vomiting, diarrhea and dehydration. Feindt experienced abdominal pain so bad that it felt like she was in labor, she said. Her daughter has since been diagnosed with a neurological condition believed to be linked to the contamination."

These are just two families. 93,000 residents were affected near military installations as far away as Iroquois Point. And the drinking water of tens of thousands of Honolulu residents remains in peril.

I also have children. And my youngest daughter, Namaka, is 5. She's almost exactly the same age as Major Feindt's daughter. I hear about these children who are becoming sick and who are being hospitalized, and as a parent, I can't imagine the fear and pain these parents must be feeling.

Namaka loves pancakes. When I'm home, we make them together. Making pancakes is simple: it's a dry pancake mix to which you just add water.

Just add water.

I can't imagine waking up one morning to find out the water I used to make my daughter's pancakes had jet fuel in it.

Yet, that's actually what thousands of Hawaii families faced.

As a military officer, I can tell you that we, as service members, accept the dangers of our duties. We serve our country with pride and knowing that at any moment we may need to pay the ultimate price.

We serve willingly and honorably, because we believe we are keeping our country safe, and that in turn our country and our military will keep our families safe.

The military has failed to keep this commitment. They have not only failed to keep our military families safe, but they have endangered all our families on Oahu. The sole source aquifer of Oahu is now tainted with fuel. We still do not know if or when it will ever be pristine again.

The Navy has shown repeatedly that they are ill-equipped and incapable of making Red Hill safe. Make no mistake: the whole of government of Hawaii believes Red Hill should be closed. The Navy must understand this. And this bill aims to achieve just that.

On Wednesday, February 2 when many of the activists here with us today gathered to protest at the entrance to the U.S. Pacific Fleet Command headquarters, with them was Ms. Ann Kamimura, a second grade teacher at Makalapa Elementary School.

This crisis is so dire that our elementary school teachers feel the need to protest on behalf of their young students.

So for our families, for the Simic family, the Feindt family, for Ms. Kamimura and her second grade students, for Frances Paulino and MARRISA Baptista, for little baby Kaia, for the students and people suffering the impacts of this crisis, today, we as elected leaders and public servants, are here to convey a clear and strong message: we see you, we hear you and we stand with you.

We, all of us here and all of us throughout Hawaii, stand with you.

We will continue to stand with you. We will fight for you and your families.

And we will not stop fighting until this contamination crisis is fixed, our drinking water is safe, and the Red Hill facility is shut down permanently.

We stand by our mantra - E Ola I Ka Wai. Water is life.

And in Hawaii, we all stand together. We care about each other; we take care of each other.

This aloha is part of our collective community fabric.

So, again, mahalo to Representative Case for your partnership on this important bill and for your leadership on the House appropriations committee.

Thank you to our colleagues at the state and county level for your working with us on a collective solution. It is only thanks to your dedication that we have reached this pivotal moment.

And thank you to the community and our military families. We are here because of you. It is our privilege to serve you. It is our honor to fight for you and our Hawaii.

Imua and Mahalo!

And now, at this time, I would like to invite my teammate in the United States House of Representatives, the Representative from Hawaii's first congressional district, the honorable Congressman Ed Case