

TESTIMONY
GM 390/391

Albert P. Nahale-a

() , Hilo, HI 96720
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Honorable Senator Clayton Hee, Chairman
Members of the Senate Committee on Water, Land, Agriculture, and Hawaiian Affairs
Hawaii State Capitol
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Senator Hee and members of the Senate Committee on Water, Land, Agriculture, and Hawaiian Affairs:

I would like to express my interest in serving on the Hawaiian Homes Commission (HHC) representing East Hawaii. I am able and willing to make the commitment required to fulfill the expectations of this role.

I am providing responses to the specific questions posed to me in an email from your staff. If additional information is desired, please do not hesitate to contact me. I will be in attendance at the Confirmation Hearing on Monday, February 16, 2009.

(a) Why do you wish to be a member of the Hawaiian Homes Commission?

When the previous HHC Commissioner Billie Baclig resigned for family reasons, she called and asked me to consider putting my name up for consideration as her replacement. I have great respect for Mrs. Baclig and believe it is my kuleana to honor her request and seek to continue her work.

From a personal perspective, my family has a rich connection to Hawaiian Home Lands, especially in East Hawaii. My grandfather received a homestead in Keaukaha and eventually served as the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) East Hawaii coordinator. My father was raised in Keaukaha and eventually received his own homestead in Panaewa, when I was seven years old. I spent the bulk of my childhood in both communities. My father's sister and my brother still reside on these homesteads and I myself live in Keaukaha just across the street from the homesteads.

In addition, I have been working in the Keaukaha homestead community for the past six years at Ka Umeke Kaeo Hawaiian Immersion Public Charter School. In this role, I have gained an even deeper understanding of the community and its hopes and dreams.

These connections give me a great appreciation for and intimate connection to the homestead communities. I believe that all of our Hawaiian Home communities can have a bright future and that the Hawaiian Home Lands Trust (HHLT) can help manifest that future. I would like to be a part of the effort to ensure that this potential is realized.

(b) How do you perceive the role and responsibilities of a member of the Hawaiian Homes Commission?

I believe the role of the HHC is to first and foremost represent the views and interests of the beneficiaries of the HHLT. In that capacity, the HHC must set the direction and oversee the work of the DHHL and its Director and employees. Furthermore, the Commission is tasked with specific functions, such as the approval and termination of leases, which it must conduct with proper care and diligence.

I believe that the HHC must also defend the trust to ensure that its beneficiaries will continue to be served in perpetuity. Also, the HHC must ensure that DHHL's work is conducted in an ethical and transparent manner.

(c) Given your understanding of the role and responsibilities of a member of the Hawaiian Homes Commission, why do you believe that you are qualified for the position? Please include a brief statement of your skills, expertise, or knowledge that would aid in your decision-making ability as a member of the Hawaiian Homes Commission.

There are many people that could serve the role of Hawaiian Homes Commissioner well. I am humbled to be considered for this post. A review of my resume will show that I have a broad range of experience in several areas all of which provide me support in fulfilling the role of commissioner. This includes experience and background with state and county government, the legislative process, affordable housing, budgets and finance, community building and community relations.

My direct experience with the Hawaiian community will also allow me to act with greater awareness and sensitivity for the beneficiaries of the HHLT. I am aware of both the assets and challenges that face the Hawaiian community and feel prepared to address matters from both perspectives. Furthermore, although I am not a cultural expert, I have enough experience to allow me to appreciate and honor Hawaiian language and culture as the HHC fulfills its work.

(d) What do you hope to accomplish during your term of service?

I would like to prompt and encourage greater dialogue amongst the HHC to ensure that we are discussing important issues with thoughtfulness and clarity. Board business can be challenging, time consuming, and complex work. To be done well, it must encourage open and fruitful discourse.

I would also like to pursue practices that empower the Hawaiian Home communities to come together and advocate for their own unified interests. For example, I would like to prompt individuals who seek my support to first seek the input and support of their community. To this end, I will be a strong advocate of beneficiary consultation to ensure that it is an effective and integral part of the way DHHL does business.

(e) Name three qualities that best describe you and that would make you stand out. How would these qualities benefit the Hawaiian Homes Commission?

I am community minded. For the Hawaiian Home Lands Trust to be truly effective it must commit to building healthy communities. My life long commitment to community development and my true passion for empowering communities will guide me in making decisions as a commissioner.

I am optimistic. One of the biggest challenges of our time is our tendency to focus on what is wrong. We complain about all that is not right with our world, our community, our government, and our lives. The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands has great capacity to make a positive difference for the lives of Hawaiians. I believe it can and will maximize that contribution by continuing to put its energies into fulfilling its mission in an energetic, committed, and positive way.

I am open. As the interim commissioner, I have learned quickly that this is a position that the community cares about deeply. There is rarely a time that I can go to the grocery store or to my children's activities or even to a family event without someone wanting to talk to me about an issue related to Hawaiian Homes. Even though it can be time consuming and challenging, you must be open to these connections to be an effective commissioner. In addition, being open means knowing that you don't have all the answers and can always learn and grow. HHC is made up nine members and to be effective you must work openly and constructively with the other eight members.

(f) Name one previous experience that would make you stand out. How would this benefit the Hawaiian Homes Commission?

There are many experiences that I believe would support my role as a commissioner, but the most important one to me is my experience as a homesteader. I was raised on Hawaiian Home Lands and lived as an adult on Hawaiian Home Lands when I moved back to Hilo from Honolulu. Being a homesteader exposes to you the best and worst of homestead life. There is a strong sense of identity and community, but there are also challenges, such as the prevalence of drug use and stigmatization from the external community. Having lived this life, I feel confident that I can support the best qualities of Hawaiian Home Communities while supporting the eradication of things that bring these communities down.

(g) Can you foresee any possible conflicts of interests that could arise during your service on the Hawaiian Homes Commission? How would you overcome any possible conflicts of interest?

I understand the importance of ensuring that I have no actual conflict interest and that every effort is made to prevent any perceived conflict of interest.

As an interim commissioner, an immediate conflict emerged relating to my position on the Board of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (NHLC) and their lawsuit against the State and DHHL, commonly referred to as the Nelson case. I sought counsel and guidance

on the potential conflict from both DHHL and NHLC. Without clear direction from either organization, I requested an opinion from the Board of Ethics which advised me:

1. I should not only refrain, but remove myself physically from any discussions related to the case.
2. I should not make any public comment on the case, even as a private citizen.
3. There was no need to resign from either board.

I felt that the advice was sound and advised both DHHL and NHLC that I would follow the Board of Ethics recommendation.

I am active in the community and serve on other boards and/or community organizations. If other matters come into question that suggest a possible conflict of interest, I will refrain from participation and seek advice from the Board of Ethics immediately.

Having served briefly as the interim East Hawaii Commissioner, I have a much deeper appreciation for the challenges facing the HHLT and the HHC. It is difficult, but very worthwhile work. I would be honored to continue to serve.

Mahalo again for your consideration and please let me know if you have any questions or would like additional information.

O wau no me ka haahaa,

Albert (aka Alapaki) Nahale-a III

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(END)