

OHA transfers nation-building task

By Timothy Hurley

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In a move to maintain its neutrality, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs is handing off responsibility for the final stage of its nation-building campaign to a new group that will independently administer an election of delegates, convention and final ratification vote.

Na'i Aupuni, a group of five volunteer and unpaid directors with ties to Hawaiian royalty, has been given nearly \$2.6 million originally earmarked for the effort aimed at moving Native Hawaiians a step closer to self-determination as authorized by the state under Act 195.

"This is an encouraging sign for our efforts to empower Native Hawaiians to determine their own future through a process that is open to all of them," OHA Chairman Robert K. Lindsey Jr. said in a news release.

The group, which formed in December, is already working with a fiscal sponsor, the nonprofit Akamai Foundation; has hired an attorney, William Meheula; and retained a public relations firm, Pacific Communications.

There is also a new website -- naiaupuni.org.

The original nation-building timeline had called for the election of delegates in September of last year, with a convention, or "aha," to draft a governing document or constitution, taking place in October or November and an up-or-down vote on the document in January.

The goal now is to complete the nation-building campaign by early 2016, although a final timeframe has not been set, officials said.

Na'i Aupuni formed after OHA reached out to the alii trusts, royal societies, and other Hawaiian organizations last year to discuss self-determination and nation building.

According to the group's website, OHA is a semiautonomous state agency that may not legally be able to oversee the delegate election process. During the meetings with OHA, leaders of the Hawaiian alii groups answered a call to establish an organization independent of OHA to lead the campaign. In the end, five members from three alii trusts volunteered.

The directors of Na'i Aupuni are:

- >> President James Kuhio Asam, executive director of the King William Charles Lunalilo Trust;
- >> Vice President Pauline Nakoolani Namu'o of Ahahui Ka'ahumanu;
- >> Secretary/Treasurer Naomi Kealoha Ballesteros of Hale O Na Ali'i;
- >> Geraldine Abbey Miyamoto of Ahahui Ka'ahumanu; and
- >> Selena Lehua Schuelke, president of Hale O Na Ali'i O Hawaii, Chapter 1.

According to Na'i Aupuni, board members decided to serve as individuals and not as representatives of any one organization in order to preserve their autonomy. Also under an agreement with OHA, Na'i Aupuni's directors will not run for office within the nation-building process.

The \$2.6 million from OHA consists of income and proceeds from the public land trust. According to an agreement with Na'i Aupuni, OHA agreed that the group has no obligation to consult with OHA on its decisions and needs no authorization from OHA to conduct its business.

Act 195 created the Native Hawaiian Roll Commission, named Kana'iolo'lowalu, which over the past year has been building a registry of Native Hawaiians eligible to participate in the nation-building process. More than 125,000 people have signed up.