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OUR OPINION

Akaka campaign allows distortion of Case views

THE ISSUE

A law partner of Senator Akaka's re-election campaign chairman has accused Rep. Ed Case of supporting anti-Hawaiian legislation.

AN effort by Rep. Ed Case to bring the discussion about Hawaiian autonomy to the forefront of the Legislature in 1998, when he chaired the state House Committee on Hawaiian Affairs, was misunderstood at the time and [is being distorted again](#) as he challenges Senator Akaka. The distortion comes in e-mail written by William Meheula, law partner of Akaka campaign chairman Andy Winer, and sent to thousands of Kamehameha Schools alumni.

In the e-mail, Meheula claimed that Case's Native Hawaiian Autonomy Act "would have terminated" the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the Hawaiian Home Lands program. Actually, the bill would have consolidated OHA, Hawaiian Home Lands and other Hawaiian programs into a single nonprofit trust, separate from government and controlled by Hawaiians.

Former Gov. John Waihee had made a similar proposal two years earlier. The Democratic majority in the House decided early in the 1998 session to hold Case's bill in committee "and leave the discussion of the issues at this point to the native Hawaiian community." The message was clear: Non-Hawaiians were not welcome to join the discussion.

As we observed at the time, that view was shortsighted, because nothing can be achieved by Hawaiians on the issue of autonomy or sovereignty without the support of non-Hawaiians. For proposing that Hawaiian programs be consolidated, Case was called a racist and accused of interfering with the sovereignty movement.

Case also sought in the late 1990s to settle the issue of ceded-land revenues going to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs after a judge ruled that the state had underpaid airport revenue to OHA. He supported legislation aimed at clarifying the law and creating a mechanism to reach a settlement. Meheula's e-mail misconstrued that as trying to deprive OHA of payments.

Case is and has been a strong supporter of sovereignty and a wide array of Hawaiian programs. He called for reining in the million-dollar compensation for Bishop Estate trustees and holding them accountable as early as 1995, two years before the Broken Trust articles in this newspaper triggered reform of what is now Kamehameha Schools.

The Akaka campaign has done little to distance itself from Meheula's political dirt. Akaka spokeswoman Elisa Yadao, who was communications director of the pre-reform Bishop Estate, said the e-mail is not part of the campaign but embraced it as "an accurate assessment of Ed's legislative record and pretty illuminating and revealing of his position on native Hawaiian issues."

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