

Chant, signs of Ka Lahui get message to president

By David Waite and Lorna W.S. Lim
Advertiser Staff Writers

Members of the pro-Hawaiian sovereignty group Ka Lahui Hawai'i chanted just long enough and loud enough to get their message across to President Clinton yesterday.

The president was nearing the end of his 12-minute speech when many of the Ka Lahui members began chanting, "Justice for Hawaiians, justice for Hawaiians."

At that point Clinton stopped and looked out over the crowd. "I hope we can provide it," Clinton said in response.

Ka Lahui members began their protest hours before the president arrived.

Mililani Trask, leader of the organization that claims more than 18,000 members, said she and about 75 members started at 1 p.m. holding signs, waving flags and chanting in unison, some dressed in traditional garb.

The number of demonstrators grew to 200, including a handful of tourists and passers-by, at one point, Trask said.

The general response from passers-by was positive, Trask said.

"People have been heeping their horns ever since we've been here," she said over the steady sound of a conch shell being blown by group member Wayne Kealoha Cullen Sr.

If the tourists look at us strange because they don't know what's going on," said



Advertiser photo by Deborah Booker

Members of Ka Lahui Hawai'i demonstrate outside the Hilton Hawaiian Village yesterday.

member Franklin Lewis.

They find out the group's mission, they're very supportive of the Ka Lahui's efforts, he said.

Passer-by Malcolm Rolsal said he sympathized with Ka Lahui's plight.

"I know what it feels like to get something taken away from you," said Rolsal, a part-Indian Waikiki resident, of the similar incident involved with the native Indians in America.

Francine Gora, chairwoman of Ka Lahui's Honolulu District, said she had to negotiate with Honolulu police officers, hotel security guards and Secret Service agents to get Ka Lahui members into a reserved area directly below the stage where Clinton spoke.

"Secret Service asked me what my purpose was here," Gora said. "I told him we wanted to meet the president and explain our position on sovereignty to him."

Gora said she explained to the Secret Service that the Ka Lahui members had invitations to sit in the reserved area. Many invitations were passed to Ka Lahui by UH faculty members and other invitations came from members of the community.

Gora said the Secret Service asked that the group not disrupt Clinton or other speakers with loud chants. Gora agreed to those restrictions but was hoping Ka Lahui members would be able to perform a pule — a prayer chant.

Those plans were dropped, however, after further discussions with city, state and federal security officers. Ka Lahui members hope to meet with Clinton tomorrow morning.

"We would like to have a nation to nation presentation of gifts," Gora said.

As of yesterday evening they had still not heard whether Clinton would meet with them.

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