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U.S. SENATOR FROM HAWAII



**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
Pacific Region Center Groundbreaking Ceremony
Monday, August 28, 2006
Ford Island**

This has been a long day in coming. In September of 2004, Admiral Lautenbacher and I stood together to celebrate the arrival of the HI'IALAKAI, the third research vessel to call Hawaii home. By creating a premiere research fleet in our region, we moved closer to our shared vision of an integrated NOAA presence in the Pacific. In place of the fragmented patchwork of NOAA sub-agencies and program offices, we envisioned a "seamless" NOAA – a new NOAA region – providing services to resource mangers, industry and the public.

Two years ago, I suggested to Admiral Lautenbacher that the next time we were in Hawaii together, I hoped it would be to break ground on a facility for a single NOAA, a Pacific regional headquarters. Admiral, I thank you for being here. Your presence makes a very strong statement. It means a lot to me.

We also salute the U.S. Navy for opening their island to their sister federal agency. It is a big commitment which required a reshuffling of their own plans. Without the Navy, we would not be here today. Admiral Alexander, I thank you very much.

Today we break ground on what will be the visible face of our commitment to excellence and leadership. The Pacific Region Center will house numerous NOAA operations, and be home for more than 400 employees. A one-stop shop for state and federal agencies, as well as our children to learn more about our precious ocean and its resources.

Although NOAA was formally established in 1970, its work began about two centuries ago. At that time, the federal government created a small agency to provide accurate nautical charts for our growing nation. Later, the weather service was born to protect lives and property from nature's fury, and the fishery service was formed to safeguard and manage the nation's marine fisheries. The federal government's recognition that these missions belonged under a single roof finally came 36 years ago when NOAA was established.

In a similar way, the Pacific Regional Center will formally bring together the many facets and faces of NOAA under one roof. It will house the expertise to manage the resources of the oceans. To predict the weather. To advise on the growth of coastal communities. To unlock the mysteries of earth's climate. To respond to the disasters of sea and storm, and to lead the Pacific in the 21st century.

Today, through NOAA's increasing investment in Hawaii, we have been able to grow strong programs with deep roots in our communities. That level of programmatic excellence has drawn well-deserved attention to Hawaii and has shined a light on your many achievements. People from throughout the nation want to know Hawaii's secret. That's simple – it's hard work, long hours and a committed staff.

However, if there is a secret, I would like to believe it is the fact that the ocean is not simply a mass to be studied, but rather an integral part of our way of life – a way of life that arises from opportunities that NOAA offers, and that is sustained by an inherent connection between Hawaii's people and the sea.

We have caught, and are indeed riding an exciting wave that will carry us forward into the future. I look forward to joining all of you in the years ahead when we open the doors to a bright, unified NOAA in Hawaii.

Congratulations to all.