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## Hawaii considering new holidays, parks to honor Obama

### Celebrate Obama Day at Obama Park, or cheer for Obama High's team

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Senate President Colleen Hanabusa wants President Obama's Aug. 4 birthday to be a state holiday, right up there with Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole Day, King Kamehameha I Day and even Christmas.

State Rep. Della Au Belatti, D-25th (Tantalus, Makiki, McCully), would like the Jan. 20 date of Obama's presidential inauguration to be forever known in the Islands as Barack Obama II Ohana Day.

And even Republican state Rep. Gene Ward, R-17th, (Kalama Valley, Queen's Gate, Hawai'i Kai), hopes to turn 4,124 square feet of overgrown scrub land owned by the state Department of Transportation into President Barack Obama Birthplace State Park.

The land at 6091 Kalaniana'ole Highway was taken over by the state for its highway widening project. The empty parcel sits next door to the modest house at 6085 Kalaniana'ole Highway where Obama was first brought home after his birth at what at the time was known as the Kapiolani Maternity & Gynecological Hospital.

"We're all Americans first and then we're Republicans and then we're Democrats," Ward said yesterday as he drove past the vacant parcel on his way into town from Hawai'i Kai. "It's bare, except for two big HECO transformers and a big rock. It's there just kind of growing weeds."

As Obama and his family and friends continue to enjoy a scheduled 12-day vacation in his hometown, the Honolulu City Council has tentatively approved an effort by Mayor Mufi Hannemann to rename 'Āina Moana Beach Park — more commonly known as Magic Island — to President Barack Obama Beach Park at Magic Island.

But it's the state Legislature that's considering resolutions that would bring six new changes in Obama's honor, such as urging the state Board of Education to rename Obama's first school — Noelani Elementary School — President Barack Hussein Obama II Elementary School, and to change the name of McKinley High School to President Barack Hussein Obama II High School.

Renaming one or two public schools in Obama's name makes sense to Rep. Gil Keith-Agaran, D-9th, (Wailuku, Pu'unēnē, Makawao), who introduced the resolution, because "part of his education agenda is to make sure that the next generation has as much opportunity as possible in an economy where we need to compete globally."

Keith-Agaran also wants Hawai'i schoolchildren to know that it's true that anyone in the Islands can dare to dream to grow up to be president of the United States.

"That sends the message to Hawai'i kids that it's true," Keith-Agaran said. "It's nice to know that as we're growing up in America, everyone has the opportunity to be as successful as possible."

Another resolution would begin the process to place the rental apartment building on Beretania Street

where Obama's grandparents lived on to the National Register of Historic Places.

While some presidents grew up in opulent beachfront homes or family compounds, Obama spent much of his childhood in the modest Punahou Circle apartments on the corner of Beretania and Punahou streets while he attended nearby Punahou School from 1971 to 1979.

His maternal grandparents rented a two-bedroom, 10th-floor apartment in the 1960s-era cinderblock walk-up in Makiki. His grandmother, Madelyn Dunham, lived there for 41 years, until her death in November 2008, just two days before Obama's election as president.

Even though "the Historic Hawaii Foundation acknowledges the unusual nature of placing a condominium or apartment building on the National Register," according to the House resolution, "the Punahou Circle apartment where President Obama and his grandmother lived represents a proud and historic part of history in Hawai'i."

Ward said his effort to turn vacant land into a park in Obama's honor — and similar efforts in the Legislature — remind local people "of the greatness of who we are in Hawai'i and what we can achieve — and he's a good example of that."

As for the empty parcel that he drives past every day, Ward called it "a little corner of Kuli'ou'ou that has really not much significance. Except that within a few yards of it was the cottage where the president had his first days on Earth."

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