



January 21, 2010

## Hawai'i's loss is Haiti's 'blessing'

*By Michael Tsai  
Advertiser Staff Writer*

Two former Hawaii Superferry vessels, whose histories were marked by roiling controversy, will now be bringing desperately needed relief to earthquake-ravaged Haiti.

Alakai, one of two Hawaii Superferry ships turned over to the federal Maritime Administration after the service went bankrupt, is being prepped for relief duty in Haiti, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood announced yesterday.

Its sister ship, the Huakai, which was built for Hawaii Superferry but never used, was pegged for duty on Tuesday and is also being prepared for service to Haiti.

The high-speed passenger and vehicle ferries, which are both berthed in a Norfolk, Va., shipyard, will be manned by civilian mariners in Haiti.

The ferries are each capable of carrying 866 passengers and 282 cars at speeds approaching 40 knots, or 46 mph, in the open ocean.

News of the ships' new assignment was bittersweet for Hawai'i state Rep. Gene Ward, a Superferry supporter.

"It's (Haiti's) gain and our loss that we no longer have a Superferry," Ward said. "It was one of those fumbles in governance that we'll need to do better with in the future."

Ward, who was in Aceh, Indonesia, in the days after the devastating 2004 Asian tsunami and witnessed first-hand the successes and failures of international relief efforts, said the two vessels will be a great help in Haiti's recovery.

"They'll be a blessing for the people of Haiti," he said. "They can transport heavy equipment like bulldozers or mobile hospitals. They'll be able to help restore electricity by bringing in large generators, things that can't easily be put on planes."

"God help us that we never have another Iniki, but Haiti can show Hawai'i what we gave up."

In addition to the two former Superferry ships, four other Marine Administration ships also were activated this week: the Gopher State and Cornhusker State, based in Newport News, Va.; the Cape May, based in Norfolk, Va.; and the Petersburg, based in Alameda, Calif.