



HAWAII'S VOICE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

NO LUNCHEON MEETING IN DECEMBER

ENJOY THE HOLIDAYS!!

NEXT MEETING —JANUARY 22, 2007

COMMUNITY ISSUES FORUM-BALLOT RESULTS

Attendees' top votes were for the following:

1. Non-dependency on fossil fuels
2. Pedestrian safety
3. Establishment of a Legislative Committee for elderly issues
4. Changes to Adult Protective Service Law

NOTES FROM NOVEMBER MEETING—KUPUNA CARE

Lot Lau, Elderly Affairs Division, City and County of Honolulu

Kupuna Care is a state-sponsored program to meet the needs of frail older adults who cannot live at home without adequate help from family and/or formal services. To qualify an individual must be a U.S. citizen or legal alien, 60 years or older, not residing in an institution, not covered by any comparable government or private home and community based service. In addition they must have an impairment of 2 or more Activities of Daily Living or Instrumental Activities of Daily Living.

Services are offered by two providers in each area: Adult Day Care, Attendant Care, Case Management, Chore Services, Home Delivered

Meals, Homemaker, Transportation and Personal Care. While there is no charge for services, the program welcomes voluntary contributions.

However, Lau explained, there can be waiting lists because of shortages of volunteers who provide some of the services, expending all the available funds. Recently, the 2006 funds were released late and have yet to be received by the agency, resulting in hardships for some of the clients.

He warned that the coming "Boomer Tsunami" will overload the program unless funding keeps up with the need. For information on services call 523-4545.

COMING UP

January 5, 2007—Kupuna Caucus meets, Room 329, State Capitol, 1:30 p.m.

January 16, 2007 —Hawaii Caregiver Coalition General Membership Meeting and Second Annual Legislative Reception, State Capitol, Room 329, 12:30pm – 2:30 p.m. Call 586-0100 to reserve for lunch.

January 16, 2007— Holo Imua Kakou (Moving Forward Together) Legislative Reception and Ice Cream Social, 3p.m. – 5p.m.

January 17, 2007—Opening of the Hawaii Legislature

Time to pay your 2007 Kokua Council Dues. Look at your address label to see the last payment date. Individual dues continue to be \$5.00, Lifetime \$100, Organization \$25. Send payments to Kokua Council, Harris United Methodist Church, 20 S. Vineyard, Honolulu HI 96813. Donations welcome. Check our website at www.kokuacouncil.org

MORE ON HAWAII Rx PLUS

Lillian Koller, Director, Hawaii State Department of Human Services (DHS), in her November 1 letter to the *Honolulu Advertiser*, provided consumers with the figures that prove that two earlier writers were correct in saying DHS's failure to negotiate with the drug manufacturers for rebates and pharmacy discounts took away an avenue to further reduce prescription drug prices for our Hawai'i residents.

She said 2,074 members of Hawaii Rx Plus saved \$25,243.00. \$25,243.00 divided by 2074 members means each member saved \$12.17!! No wonder there are so few members out of all those who could be eligible; and she didn't respond to the issue. Why didn't she negotiate when that was the clear intent of the legislature?

"It's impossible to make someone negotiate. You can put them in the room, but they may not

really fight for the lowest prices." Below is an imagined script illustrating this.

Lillian Koller: Aloha, we are here to negotiate better prescription drug prices with you for Hawaii's Rx Plus program.

Pfizer: Our bottom line offer for this pill is \$75. Take it or leave it.

LK: Nonsense. We will pay \$74.

Pfizer: It's a deal. You drive a very hard bargain.

LK: Thanks. We want to do the best for you --- sorry -- - for our health care consumers in Hawaii.

Pfizer: We want to do the best job on them --- sorry, for them --- too.

See what I mean. So who would negotiate strongly for lower prices? And how do we get a law that will make that happen?" *Larry Geller*

Drug Industry Benefiting on Backs of the Poor, *Alliance for Retired Americans*

The already lucrative pharmaceutical industry has discovered a new way to increase earnings. The automatic transfer of 6.5 million low-income people into the Part D program from Medicaid has created much larger than expected profits for drug makers, with some estimates stating the windfall could be up to \$2 billion this year. Because Medicaid, which by law received the lowest available drug prices, no longer buys the medicines, drug companies are able to charge insurers higher prices for the drugs offered under Part D plans. The drug industry has raised wholesale prices of brand-name drugs an average of 3.6% since Part D went into effect. However, while

insurers are currently paying more for prescription drugs, they are also benefiting significantly from Part D. United Health Group reported this week a 26% rise in its second-quarter profit, in part because of its new Part D business. Net earnings rose from \$770 million a year earlier to \$974 million. "This is the kind of information the drug and insurance companies want to keep secret," said George J. Kourpias, President of the Alliance. "It proves the point we've been making all along. Part D was not created to help seniors have access to affordable drugs; it was created as a gift to drug industry cronies."

LACK OF HEALTH INSURANCE KILLS SIX TIMES AS MANY AMERICANS EACH YEAR AS 9/11 DID

Sarah Ruth Van Gelder and Dough Pibell, *Yes Magazine*—An estimated 50 million Americans lack medical insurance, and a similar and rapidly growing number are underinsured. The uninsured are excluded from services, charged more for services, and die when medical care could save them—an estimated

18,000 die each year because they lack medical coverage. But it's not only the uninsured that suffers. Of the more than 1.5 million bankruptcies filed in the U.S. each year, about half are a result of medical bills; of those, three-quarters of filers had health insurance.

Businesses are suffering too. Insurance premiums increased 73 percent between 2000 and 2005, and per capita costs keep rising.

Employers who want to offer employee health care benefits can't compete with low-road employers who offer none. Nor can they compete with companies located in countries that offer national health insurance . . .

Among politicians and pundits, a universal, publicly funded system is off the table. The United States leaves the health of its citizens at the mercy of an expensive, patchwork system where some get great care while others get none at all. The overwhelming majority —75 percent, according to an October 2005 Harris Poll—want what people in other wealthy countries have: the peace of mind of universal health insurance.

Larry Geller, *Disappeared News*—HMSA's insurance premiums are no longer regulated because Rep. Bob Herkes replaced a simple bill extending the sunset contained in the original law with complicated language written, he admitted, by the industry (HMSA and Kaiser lobbyists). At the same time, Rep. Herkes was harboring an "intern" in his office who was the executive administrator of HMSA Foundation. The industry-written bill failed to make it, and so the insurance commissioner's ability to regulate premiums died. Or should I say, was killed by an industry-sympathetic legislator?

The House leadership shares responsibility for whatever rate increases small businesses and

individuals will have to bear because it refused to allow a hearing for the companion bill and failed to intervene and recommit the conference committee changes so that Herkes' alterations could be repaired.

Insurance rate regulation can be re-established this coming legislative session if the small businesses of the state will join together to protect their profits from being snatched up by their insurance carrier.

Perhaps it's also time to look into whether HMSA is truly a "mutual benefit society" and deserving of the tax relief of a non-profit. It's almost impossible for its membership to influence its board of directors without something like 18,000 signatures (a change from 100,000 the previous requirement).

KOKUA COUNCIL SHINING STARS

Eloise Monsarrat, volunteer with the Human Animal Bond Program at Tripler Army Medical Center met with President George W. Bush at Hickam Air Force Base November 20 to receive the Volunteer Service award for her service that makes a difference in the lives of others. The Human Animal Bond Program, which is sponsored by the American Red Cross, improves human health through pets and animal therapy. Monsarrat has volunteered more than 10,000 hours in the past 16 years as a pet handler with the program.

Laura Manis, longtime volunteer and senior advocate, has received the 2006 Andrus Award for Community Service from **AARP Hawaii**.

It is the most prestigious award given to an AARP volunteer and is named for the organization's founder, Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus. Manis was recognized for "giving voice" to senior issues at the Legislature. She was project director last year for the first Silver Legislature convened in Hawaii in more than 10 years. One result was the formation of a bipartisan Kupuna Caucus, which supported more than a dozen bills affecting seniors that were signed into law this year.

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Hawaii's Voice for a Better Future
www.kokuacouncil.org

Who Are We?

The **Kokua Council** is one of Hawaii's oldest advocacy groups. There is a \$5 annual membership to defray printing and postage costs. At each meeting, topical issues are presented for discussion and possible action. We embrace diversity and extend a special invitation to any senior or intergenerational minded individual interested in advocating for these important issues in Hawaii." All are welcome. **WHEN** 4th Monday of every month, 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. **WHERE** Harris United Methodist Church @ Nuuanu and Vineyard Blvd., Ample parking and a light lunch are provided for \$5. **REACH US** c/o Harris United Methodist Church, 20 South Vineyard, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Mission: "Kokua Council seeks to empower seniors and other concerned citizens to be effective advocates in shaping the future and well-being of our community, with particular attention to those needing help in advocating for themselves. "

President	Larry Geller, 540-1928, lgeller@igc.org	Treasurer Ed. Fund	T.J. Davies tjdavies@juno.com
Vice President	Tony Lenzer, 261-2095, tlenzer@hawaii.rr.com	Treasurer Advocacy	Evelyn Shepard, 595-4025
Vice President	Laura Manis, 597-8838, manis@lava.net	General Info	Eloise Monsarrat, 839-1545
Secretary	Betty Sugarman, 261-8936, betty333@hawaiian.net		
Newsletter	Jeanne Y. Ohta, 373-3186, jyohta@hawaii.rr.com	Website:	www.kokuacouncil.org

JOIN KOKUA COUNCIL

Yes! I want to join Kokua Council. Here are my annual dues and my contact information. I understand that my phone number will be added to the Kokua Phone Tree and I will receive the monthly newsletter and occasional e-mails. Our fiscal year starts in January. Please make checks payable to Kokua Council.

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