

2007 Hawaii Alliance for Retired Americans
LEGISLATIVE REVIEW
“THE GOOD, BAD, AND UGLY”
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13, 2007, 8:30 TO NOON
STATE CAPITOL, ROOM 325

73 attendees, 7 legislators, 20 Government and Non-profit Organizations

I. Welcome –Al Hamai, President, Hawaii Alliance of Retired Americans

II. Legislative Leaders

1. Rep. Calvin Say, Speaker of the House: gave legislature grade of C+

- Legislature has responsibility to really understand the seniors’ plight and revisit long term care costs
- Currently there are not enough resources available for seniors.
- Many issues that affect seniors were not addressed in the 2007 session, i.e. medical malpractice, death with dignity, long-term care, and universal health care.
- Suggested that next year might be difficult to take up such controversial issues (election year), but these will be major issues in the next 5 to 6 years.
- He suggested developing a questionnaire to find out legislators positions on issues we favor.
- Health care for all retirees is a major issue.
- Employers will be looking at where cuts can be made.
- Whether we have enough care homes is a major issue.
- In the 2007 session, a bill was passed for Craigsid in Nuuanu to be run by Arcadia.
- Retirees need to visit their legislators to lobby on issues which affect seniors.
- Health benefits for government retirees are at risk.
- In 2008 we need to elect a President who cares about people.

2. Ann Freed representing Senator Roz Baker: Sen. Baker is supportive of retiree issues.

3. Representative Kirk Caldwell, Majority Leader: Gave legislature grade of B- because the legislature worked on more than just majority package bills.

- “You make things happen”. Get involved in the legislative process – lobbying-does make a difference.
- Strong fiscal responsibility was the focus of the House in the in the 2007 session.
- “Affordability was the theme to assure that we and our children can afford to live in Hawaii.
- Five areas were looked at:
 - Tax relief- total relief for 2006 and 2007 was \$279 million
 - Health care- cited Keiki Care bill (pilot program for 3 years); Rx Plus veto override; reinstated rate regulation; increased Medicare reimbursements, which will be especially important for rural areas; funded acquisition of Kahuku Hospital; and decentralized the hospital system.
 - Affordable housing (homelessness & affordability) appropriated \$25 million for Kukui Gardens (850 affordable units with the possibility of building up to 3000 more over time); passed an omnibus housing bill; appropriate \$6 million for homeless shelters. Need to support a living wage.

- Education: provided funds for repair and maintenance for public schools and funding for UH West Oahu campus.
- Energy and environmental protection: Global warming must be reduced to 1990 levels. Dams and reservoirs will be strengthened. Funded a special investigator for Kaloko Dam and passed a greenhouse gas bill (to tackle global warming).

4. Representative Cynthia Thielen, Minority Party

- Climate change and its impact is a crisis.
- She will draft a bill which establishes benchmarks in 2013 on and is asking for our support.
- She asks that we immediately contact the Governor's office to support HB226 the Global warming bill that she introduced.
- The States need to lead the Federal Government in this area.
- Crosswalk safety was an issue in her district and all of us need to contact our representatives if this is a problem in our community.

5. Senator Will Espero, Chair, Public Safety Committee

- Sending prisoners to the mainland and breaking up families must not be tolerated.
- He will be touring the islands to locate areas for new prisons.
- Prisons must have programs that lead to rehabilitation. Singled out S.B. 932, his reentry and rehabilitation bill, which provides for staffing for all islands and a legislative oversight committee.
- Cited public safety as the biggest failure of the Lingle Administration.
- Lobby the Lt. Gov. -- since he's running for Governor, should see what he'd do.

6. Representative Josh Green, M. D. Chair of Health Committee

- Although Hawaii has been rated as number one in the nation for access to health care, this is not so on the neighbor islands. There is a scarcity of services and medical specialists. This should not be.
- I will work for universal health coverage. There is a need for universal health care, but there's too much opposition from special interests, like the insurance industry. Several States may need to try single-payer system.
- Said long-term care beds are a problem that affects acute care hospitals. If someone needs LTC but is in an acute bed, rates are higher.
- Biggest issue this session was what to do with Hawaii Health Systems Corporation (HHSC). The bill, S.B.1792, may be vetoed, but probably not. Five regional boards will be responsible to provide for what people need. Could create competition among the regions and this could decrease HHSC's safety net role.
- Keiki Care (H.B. 1008) will provide medical insurance for every child.
- Rx Plus (H.B. 10) tells the Administration to participate in bargaining pools. Pharmaceutical companies must work with insurance companies and us to make things affordable.
- Commended seniors as being well organized. Made suggestions. Pick two or three issues and don't let up. If long-term care is your issue, don't let other groups dilute your ideas. Develop a solid front. When people speak up, that's what gets passed.
- Gave us his e-mail address to get on his Power Health List. The address is: joshuaboorthgreen@yahoo.com.

III. Questions and Comments

Question: Shocked that her taxes are so high, that there is an opposition to Death with Dignity, inter-island ferry. Rail system should stop at the airport and university and not at Salt Lake.

Response: Rep. Caldwell. Taxes; the legislature is beginning to address this issue. Death with Dignity; we need community support. Ferry; It is about offering a choice. Fixed rail; also a choice issue.

Question: Long Term care financing needs to be revisited. Are you considering a special session? Do you think it is time for a constitutional convention; last one was 30 years ago? Consider a Department of Aging and Disabilities at the Cabinet level.

Response: Speaker Say; Special session, yes but it needs both Houses to agree.

Con-Con; Reps. Say, Oshiro, Yes, Caldwell, Open

Question: Costs are too high for rents and insurance.

Response: Rep. Thielen; This is a county issue but needs to be addressed.

Rep. Oshiro; Due to Hurricane Katrina, costs will remain high.

Question: Problem is money and where it will come from is a serious issue: keeping people safe has not been addressed, funding too little for the Ombudsman and Adult Protective services.

Response: Rep. Oshiro; many of these programs will cost money but will be looked at in the next session.

Question: Rep. Caldwell did not support CarePlus program. HB 10 the prescription drug program has to be followed to make sure it is implemented with real savings.

Response: Rep. Caldwell. Supports the idea of CarePlus, but voted against it because the premiums should be progressive, people who have higher incomes should pay more.

Rep. Thielen; Supported the Rx program and she can be contacted to assist in a follow-up.

Comment: Costs- taxes are too high; housing is too high, cost for rail is too high. We need to practice conservation and alternative means to reduce costs. Encouraged legislators to make Hawaii more affordable and a better place to live.

Question: Director of the Office on Aging position is vacant; need support of a program for aging at the University of Hawaii.

Response: Speaker Say. The administration is responsible for making the appointment.

Through the school of Social Work, the legislature is looking to work with the University on addressing aging issues but both issues are not the responsibility of the legislature.

Rep. Thielen: She will try to help with the administration.

Comment: We need a comprehensive Health Care Program.

IV. Report from Kupuna Caucus

Wes Lum and Anthony Lenzer explained the grid “Kupuna Caucus Legislation Adopted in 2007 Legislative Session”. This was a handout distributed to everyone at the session.

V. The agencies listed below spoke for 1 minute each describing their mission.

1. AMERICANS FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION
2. AARP
3. HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION - RETIRED
4. PABEA- POLICY ADVISORY BOARD FOR ELDERLY AFFAIRS
5. HGEA
6. KOKUA COUNCIL
7. EAD – ELDERLY AFFAIRS DIVISION OF CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU
8. MAUI AREA AGENCY ON AGING
9. MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
10. HARA – HAWAII ALLIANCE OF RETIRED AMERICANS
11. ILWU
12. ASSISTIVE LIVING OPTIONS IN HOUSING
13. CAREGIVERS COALITION
14. HAWAII PACIFIC UNIVERSITY-NURSING
15. MOILILI COMMUNITY CENTER
16. LANAKILA MEALS ON WHEELS
17. UPW-UNITED PUBLIC WORKERS
18. MACHINISTS UNION
19. DRUG POLICY FORUM
20. AFT-American Federation of Teachers

VI. Evaluation- 35 responses:

Length of the Review was about right; that they liked the format of the agenda-- presentations by legislators, the questions and responses period, and the presentations by representatives of the 20 organizations present; that we should have more frequent Reviews; that this Legislative Review was "worthwhile" (13) and "very worthwhile," (16); and that seven (7) have volunteered to assist with planning a future Review.