



WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP OTHERS

Please join us for lunch
MONDAY, June 23, 2008

11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Miyama Main Hall, Harris United Methodist Church
Nuuanu Ave. and South Vineyard Blvd.
Ample parking - driveway off Nuuanu Ave.

AGENDA:

- 11:30** Luncheon: Selection of Pizza, Salad, Dessert from Marilyn, \$5.00 Donation
- 11:45** Welcome, Introductions and Remarks, Larry Geller, President
- 12:00** Program: "The Rush to Biofuels," Henry Curtis, Chair, Life of the Land
- 1:00** Adjourn

Lunch Host: Marilyn Seely

Board meeting: 10:00 a.m. Preceding Lunch.

HARA Post Legislative Forum, the Good, Bad and Ugly

The 2nd Annual HARA Review was very successful based on comments received from 80 people who signed up to attend, community people, and those representing over 30 organizations, both public and private.

"Shining Light" Certificates of Appreciation were presented to: **Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Representative Marilyn B. Lee, and Representative Roy M. Takumi** for their efforts on behalf of seniors' issues. In addition, **Al Beeman** of Hilo was recognized for his almost single-handed efforts to gain passage of SB 156 to authorize permanent registration for absentee voters. The bill is awaiting the Governor's approval.

The program included: greetings and remarks by Speaker of the House Calvin Say and Senate Vice President Donna Mercado Kim; an

assessment of 2008 session by Majority Leaders Senator Gary Hooser and Representative Kirk Caldwell; and a report by Senators Les Ihara and Suzanne Chun Oakland, and Representative Marilyn Lee on the Kupuna Caucus/ Joint Legislative Committee on Family Caregiving bills. Senator Gordon Trimble presented the minority party perspective.

After each group of speakers, the audience questioned the speakers and suggested considerations for the 2009 session. Mostly frequently expressed was concern over the timely release of funds by the administration. In addition, written suggestions and concerns from the attendees for consideration at the 2009 legislative session were sent to all legislators and the Governor. Those wishing to have a copy of the above and/or notes of the proceedings may contact Laura Manis, manis@lava.net or 597-8838.

NOTES FROM MAY MEETING: "OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND"

Long Term Care Ombudsman John McDermott

The State LTC Ombudsman identifies, investigates, and resolves complaints related to the health, safety, welfare, and rights of residents in any licensed long term care facility. The Hawaii LTCO Program has 2 full-time Ombudsmen and 1 full-time Volunteer Coordinator for 8,129 beds in 503 facilities. Of those 503 facilities, 128 are on the Neighbor Islands. Presently, the LTCOP depends on trained and certified volunteers to help advocate for the residents but volunteers sometimes come and go. While the program could not exist without volunteers, volunteers are not a substitute for paid full-time staff.

For the third time, legislative bills to add 3 paid LTC Ombudsmen for each Neighbor Island were heard but did not pass. Kokua Council has testified in favor of this expansion and will do so again next year.

Too often friends' and relatives' visits to residents dwindle with time—sometimes resulting in neglect and even abuse. It is important that families remain involved.

While most care homes, nursing homes and assisted living facilities are fine, be aware of "red flags." Does the caregiver insist you call in

advance before you visit? Are there other restrictions placed on your visits? Is the caregiver qualified, trained? Is there a trained, responsible substitute caregiver present at all times? Listen to the residents and pay attention to what they are saying. Too often, victims of abuse or neglect are too frightened to complain. Create a safer environment by taking the resident outside the facility so they can speak openly, freely, and without intimidation.

An audience member raised a concern about the charge of \$500 a month by case managers for residents of foster homes and expanded care homes, noting many of these visits are less than an hour. McDermott explained what case management is all about and why it is a state requirement. Families and residents have the right to choose who they want as their case manager, discuss what they can expect from their case manager and negotiate a price that is fair to both sides.

Anyone wishing more information or wanting to be trained as a volunteer ombudsman, call John at 586-0100.

State Regulators Seek Greater Authority to Oversee Medicare Advantage Plans

The *New York Times* reported that state officials will soon ask Congress for more power to regulate the marketing of private Medicare insurance plans to seniors. The changes are being requested because state officials are still receiving complaints of high-pressure sales tactics that have led some beneficiaries to sign up for unsuitable policies. In the draft of a report prepared by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, state officials say they have received large numbers of complaints but often cannot provide direct assistance to beneficiaries or hold insurers accountable because they have not been given the authority.

States can regulate the activities of insurance agents and brokers who sell Medicare Advantage (MA) plans, but they generally cannot regulate the

insurance companies that offer such plans. The officials propose setting common standards for marketing the private plans, which could then be enforced by states that adopt them. State insurance regulators and consumer groups feel very strongly that offering sales agents bonuses and commissions has resulted in significant misconduct, ranging from inappropriate sales to outright fraud. Recommendations made in the draft report include that insurers should avoid the use of confusing product names like "gold," "silver" and "value," which have no standard definition, and that when beneficiaries ask for information on a drug plan, they should not be pressed to buy a comprehensive MA plan. "Medicare Advantage plans already cost 13% more than traditional Medicare, and that's legal."

CORRECTION

Last month's newsletter incorrectly described SB868 RELATING TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS. It should have read, "Maintains a policy of open communications with board and commissions when a director is considering invoking their right to represent a board or commission before the legislature."

Letters to the Editor

Rising costs, difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff members, and declining reimbursement rates make it necessary to make improvements in Medicare reimbursements to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries have access to health care services. I support efforts to increase Medicare reimbursements for service providers and will work with my colleagues on this matter. In addition, I will continue to advocate for lower Medicare Part B premiums so that beneficiaries have access to affordable, comprehensive, and quality health care coverage.

Senator Daniel K. Akaka

I'm happy to say that after much haggling with and thwarting the most effective insurance-company lobbyist in town, the Democratic Party platform now explicitly endorses the idea of single payer, universal health insurance.

*George Simson
American for Democratic Action*

Congratulations for your help in passing the Big Island Public Funding bill. After ten years of organizing, writing letters, holding community meetings, signing petitions, canvassing, sign-waving, meeting with legislators, and the like, we've been able to do what most people said could never happen: we convinced the Legislature to pass through a comprehensive public funding bill.

While the bill only creates a pilot program for the Big Island, this is still an important first step, and we want to **thank you again for all of your help! Now, it's up to Governor Lingle. She basically has 3 options: 1. Sign the bill into law. 2. Veto the bill. 3. Do nothing with the bill and let it pass into law by default (after July 8th).**

*Kory Payne
Voter Owned Elections*

Older Voters Turning Out in Twice the Numbers as Those Under 30

While organizers and the media have made much of record turnout among young voters in recent months, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reports that older Americans remain the most reliable and consistent group of voters. According to exit polls, at least one-third of all voters in most of the 2008 Presidential primaries have been over age 60, with the number rising to over 40% in states like Massachusetts, Ohio and California. Senior voters have generally turned out in twice the numbers as people under 30. Candidates

recognize the importance of the "grey vote" and are expected to campaign hard for this demographic in part because young people have not yet established voting as a habit. Those under 30 are also more likely to face problems with residency requirements when they do go to fill out a ballot—they move much more frequently than seniors and may not have properly updated registration information, and college students must frequently vote by mail when they attend universities out-of-state.

I-Save RX

Kokua Council fought for years to find a program that would allow our citizens to be able to afford the drugs they need. So we were pleased when I-Save Rx prescription drug bill was supported in the editorials of both the *Honolulu Advertiser* and the *Honolulu Star Bulletin*. The bill finally passed the legislature and overcame the Governor's veto. Unfortunately, we have discovered that the Governor has notified the legislature that she has no intention of implementing the bill saying it is illegal, even though the Governors of five other states had no such compunction.

The *Honolulu Star Bulletin* editorial "Getting Bargain Drugs is a Good State Policy" pointed

out, the law would have allowed Hawaii residents to buy safe, quality prescription drugs from Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand over the internet at greatly reduced prices for people with inadequate or no drug coverage.

Our members are mostly seniors and many have to use costly medicines.

This administration also did not implement a previous bill permitting the state to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for lower prices; HB10 Relating to Prescription Drugs. This would have been legal.

We want the Governor to reconsider for the benefit of the many residents who have to decide between buying food and buying medicine.



Kokua Council for Senior Citizens
of Hawaii Education Fund, Inc.
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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 advocates and 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
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Secretary		Newsletter	Jeanne Y. Ohta, 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.

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS	LIFE MEMBER	ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS	
___\$5.00	___\$100.00	___\$25.00	DONATIONS _____

Name _____ Phone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Mail to: Treasurer, Kokua Council, Harris United Methodist Church, 20 S. Vineyard Blvd.,
Honolulu, HI 96813