

ON FREEDOM AND CAPTIVITY

May 23, 2009

Space—Freedom to Explore. *Our five year mission: to boldly go where no man has gone before.*

Okay, trekkies, time to get excited. Flying in space could be five to six years away from being reality here in Hawaii. Tourism is the chief generator of jobs and revenue in Hawaii, reaching into all sectors of our state's economy. Expanding new niche offerings, such as space tourism, can enhance Hawaii's appeal as a tourist destination.

Space tourism could boost Hawaii's revenue, kick start economic development, and create high-paying aerospace jobs. Its profitability potential was confirmed in 2007, when Virgin Galactic, the space flight company in Sir Richard Branson's Virgin group of companies, reaped about \$31 million in ticket sales, from over 100 passengers. Last December the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) awarded a launch license to the New Mexico Spaceport Authority to establish a commercial spaceport. A limited number of these spaceport licenses is expected to be issued. Preparing Hawaii to be in the position to join this exclusive club is crucial for the economic advantages this license may bring. A bill I had introduced as a House counterpart, HB 994, appropriates from the tourism special fund and airports special fund the money to apply for a spaceport license from the FAA.

In 2007, the Office of Aerospace Development was established to promote the space industry in Hawaii. This past Session, SB 537 creates an Aerospace Advisory Committee of 16 appointees, to advise and assist the Legislature and state agencies in monitoring, evaluating and promoting aerospace development across the state. The committee is given the task of following trends elsewhere; identifying and promoting aerospace development opportunities; facilitating relationships with other agencies, institutions, and organizations; and recommending policies to foster growth and diversification in the industry.

Hawaii is world famous as a site for astronomical research. Light pollution, however, has increasingly made scientific observation and data collection more difficult. SB 536 requires a statewide starlight reserve strategy to preserve the quality of the night sky and its value for cultural, scientific, landscape, natural, and astronomical purposes.

It would be fun to get Captain Kirk out here for the first flight....

On the Other End of the Spectrum – Prison Confinement

This past session, my Senate Committee continued to look at ways of improving our re-entry programs in the prison system to help inmates who will one day be released into society. Since statistics show the majority of inmates will be imprisoned for less than 10 years, it is imperative that those inmates in our custody are provided tools and assistance in order to minimize the chances of their return to prison. Too often, we read or hear about offenders who have multiple arrests and multiple convictions.

There were several measures that were successful in helping to reform our prison system. The Senate inserted in the state budget over \$500,000 over two years to fund a pilot project in the Department of Public Safety that will utilize GPS electronic monitoring as an alternative to incarceration. These inmates would be carefully selected, non-violent offenders who would be monitored closely in the community. Drug testing, mandatory employment, skill building, and training should be elements in an electronic monitoring program.

Senate Bill 539 reorganizes a division in the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and emphasizes reentry programs and servicing. It also creates an advisory Re-entry Commission to monitor and work with the DPS to make certain the re-entry needs of inmates are being met.

House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 199 will have the auditor conduct a private prison performance audit of the Saguro Correctional Center in Arizona where we incarcerate almost 1900 inmates. We export over \$60 million each year to care for our inmates out of state, and the audit is intended to ensure our tax dollars are being spent wisely and efficiently and to ensure we are getting the servicing and programming the contract details. Although there are calls to return inmates from the mainland, some offenders need to be incarcerated on the mainland so it is important to review and audit the system which has already cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars.

HCR27 supports a study to be completed by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs that would look at the criminal justice system and its disparate treatment of Native Hawaiians. Native Hawaiians are approximately 22% of our population but account for about 40% of the prison population. Some think the figure is higher. The study is intended to look at the Judicial system and its treatment of Hawaiians and other minorities to determine whether policies, procedures, or deficiencies have led to the high incarceration rate of Native Hawaiians.

Finally, House Bill 358 allows certain offenders to be placed in secure drug treatment facilities in lieu of incarceration. This bill just adds another option to be used for drug offenders in our system.

The Legislature believes these bills and resolutions will have a positive impact on our prison system and will continue the on-going efforts to reform our prison system in the future. The fewer dollars spent on prisons means more for education, social services and other areas.

Many of our inmates must stay incarcerated due to the nature of their crimes. For others, incarceration with some rehabilitation and personal programming can improve the offender and the system.