



SENATOR WILL ESPERO & YOUR LEGISLATURE WORKING FOR YOU

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WEST OAHU, HERE WE COME!

July 30, 2007, 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Keoneula Elementary School Cafeteria, 91-970 Kaileolea Drive, Ocean Pointe, Ewa Beach

Chancellor Gene Awakuni of UH West Oahu will discuss the long awaited UH West Oahu Campus, and Christina Uebelin, Special Assistant, Office of the Administrative Director of the Courts, will provide an update on the Kapolei Court House. Please join us for this informative meeting on the exciting changes happening in the Ewa / Kapolei area.

New Chair of Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OMPO)

I have just had the honor of being selected as the new Chairman of OMPO, after serving this last year as Vice-Chair, several more years as a member, as well as being a member of the Senate Transportation Committee. Transportation is one of my primary concerns, and I am thankful that my colleagues in the Senate have joined me in advocating for the expansion of our transportation infrastructure to relieve gridlock for the growing population on the Leeward coast.

The opportunities we have for improving conditions here on Oahu are exciting. The City recently launched its new focus on transit oriented development, the Legislature just gave new funding for more bike paths, and the rail project is underway. These are just some of the ways we hope to help all our island residents get where we need to go with a smile. I'm especially upbeat about the rail project, having returned from Shanghai, China, where the delegation and I rode on the only commercial magnetic levitation commuter system in the world. Serving Shanghai, China's largest city, with a population of over 20 million, the rail system was convenient, efficient and a pleasure to ride. Honolulu deserves a good system, too.

Federal law requires all urban areas with a population over 50,000 to have a planning organization (MPO) to ensure comprehensive, cooperative and continuing ("3-C") planning for transportation, and channels federal funding through this process. While the bulk of planning is done by the state and city transportation departments, OMPO coordinates these to formulate Oahu Regional Transportation Plan, the Overall Work Plan, and the Transportation Improvement Plan to meet and program federal funding for projects and programs. OMPO is composed of a policy

committee, technical advisory committee, and citizen advisory committee. OMPO does not construct projects or implement programs; these are done by the City and State departments.

Speaking of S.B. 932

Re-entry and reintegration was the message from the community to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Prisons at the three hour long July 7, 2007 public meeting on Maui. Many encouraged legislators to fund programs that reduce repeat offenses by helping offenders change their thinking and learn how to live constructive lives. Several testifiers pointed to the innovative, cost-effective programs of Connecticut and other states as models for Hawaii. Those attending gave strong support to S.B. 932, which funds \$3.5 million of programs to help prisoners successfully re-enter their communities after completing their sentences. The state corrections budget for FY 2003-2004 was \$190 million plus \$50 million more to the Corrections Corporation of America to house Hawaii inmates in four mainland prisons.

The Maui Economic Opportunity's BEST ("Being Empowered and Safe Together") Reintegration Program is one of Hawaii's more successful ones. Alan Nouchi, Warden for Maui Community Correctional Center, praised BEST's effectiveness, which was punctuated by hearty applause from the audience. Dr. Marilyn Brown, who also testified, independently evaluated the BEST program. Its recidivism rate of 15% demonstrates its effectiveness in helping ex-prisoners to learn to live "normal" lives. (In contrast, a 1994 Bureau of Justice report shows that 67% of all prisoners are rearrested within three years of release.)

Carrie Ann Shirota, the dynamic young director of BEST, told legislators, "When you build prisons, they will be filled....Don't warehouse people...It is cheaper to educate and rehabilitate than to incarcerate." Shirota likened conventional prisons to "gladiator school" which she says train people to be violent. She noted the recent stabbing at the Saguro facility in Arizona, which houses Hawaii inmates, and reports from inmates that they tried new drugs in prison that they hadn't tried on the streets. BEST provides a comprehensive array of transitional support services to help ex-offenders successfully reintegrate into the community. The program helps prevent re-offenses by promoting family reunification, cultural renewal, changing ways of thinking to stay straight, mentoring for support, case management to help stay on the right track, job skills training, employment assistance, housing assistance, and other services. Nearly 400 clients have participated in BEST's programs since its inception in 2003.

Shirota stressed alternatives that address the underlying factors that contribute to crime: poverty, education, broken families, lack of employment and vocational skills, housing, mental health, substance abuse. Echoing opinions of others that helping inmates reintegrate is crucial to reducing recidivism, Shirota said that the shortage of these services, including job training in industries with livable wages, is a key reason that individuals return to prison. She cited the success of mainland programs that deal with these needs. Other measures she urged lawmakers to consider are earned time credits (reducing time for inmates who demonstrate good behavior); increasing opportunities and support for parole, probation, and supervised release; drug court; early release of non-violent offenders; increasing the availability of transitional and halfway housing; and amending sentencing laws. All of these, she says, have been shown in other states to be more cost-effective ways of dealing with inmate populations.

Maui Councilwoman Gladys Baisa echoed Shirota, saying "Please do not allow S.B. 932 to go unfunded." She urged legislators to consider San Francisco's Delancey Street program, which has been replicated in major mainland cities. Baisa asked legislators to think outside the box with respect to incarceration, saying that putting people in warehouses will not work, but helping people change their lives will. Baisa pointed out that the Delancey Street program is not publicly funded, but supports itself through successful operation of businesses. (*More on Delancey Street in our next issue.*)

All In A Day's Work

July 10 was the 45th day following adjournment, meaning, for the Legislature, the last day to override a veto by the Governor on bills passed during Session. The Legislature does not always call a Special Session for vetoed bills; last year it did not. This year the Legislature decided to call a Special Session to take action on twelve vetoes. A two-thirds vote is needed from both the House and Senate to override a veto. At the end of the day, the Senate voted to override all twelve, while the House voted to override eleven. The eleven bills the Legislature passed into law by overriding the Governor's veto were:

| <u>Bill No.</u> | <u>Title</u> | <u>Summary</u> |
|-----------------|--|---|
| SB 1191 | Pedestrian Safety | <i>funds pedestrian safety improvements for the elderly</i> |
| SB 1922 | Creative Media | <i>develops educational programs in University of Hawaii system</i> |
| SB 1066 | Invasive Species | <i>pest inspection, quarantine and eradication of marine commercial container shipments</i> |
| HB 30 | International Trade Agreements | <i>state approval required</i> |
| HB 718 | Kakaako | <i>conservation and remediation of Kewalo</i> |
| HB 310 | Technology | <i>increasing broadband access</i> |
| HB 1270 | State Planning | <i>Hawaii Sustainability Plan</i> |
| HB 1503 | Employment | <i>notification to dislocated workers</i> |
| HB 1605 | Traffic Control | <i>Maui traffic control center</i> |
| HB 1830 | Child Protection | <i>Safe haven for abandoned infants</i> |
| SB 932 | Comprehensive Offender Re-entry System | <i>establishes and funds re-entry services programs</i> |

Senator Will Espero represents Ewa through lower Waipahu. He is the Chair of the Public Safety Committee, the Vice Chair of the Economic Development and Taxation Committee, and a member of the committees on Commerce, Consumer Protection, & Affordable Housing, and Transportation & International Affairs. You can reach his office by telephone at 586-6360, fax at 586-6361, or e-mail at senespero@capitol.hawaii.gov