

# LEGISLATIVE CONNECTION

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## FOCUS HAWAII

Grandmothers note how Mala Wharf in Lahaina has shortened drastically from the hippie era, how the waves didn't use to almost lap up the makai side of the Sheraton Waikiki, and how Kailua residents used to have a stretch of sand between their back walls and the ocean. I recently attended a Climate Change Teach-In at the William S. Richardson School of Law. I was impressed by the many presentations given by experts on global warming and renewable energy. Their message was sobering: as an island community, Hawaii's much envied, prime beach front is en route to becoming underwater real estate. Their observations of the effect of rising sea levels due to melting ice caps and glaciers confirm what kupuna already know – islands are in jeopardy. Some Micronesians and other Pacific Islanders migrating to Hawaii also explain the move as due in part to the rising sea levels on their native islands.

The scientific and anecdotal evidence is worth heeding. We need to change our energy use habits to slow down the impact our fossil fuel dependent lifestyle has had on our planet. I've introduced several bills to help our environment. These are three of them. SB 2885 would ban the sale of incandescent light bulbs which are not only inefficient, giving off only 5% of its energy as light, but the heat generated also makes rooms warmer, adding workload on air conditioners. SB 2549 directs the construction of charging stations for electric cars to facilitate the transition off petroleum-run cars, to reduce our dependence on costly oil that has strained family budgets over the last several years. SB 2548 would require solar water heaters as standard features on new homes.

For those with less interest in the environment, we should mention the economic costs of dependence on oil. Exxon last year posted the highest annual profit of ***any*** U.S. company, nearly \$41 billion, with other oil companies following close by in their record profits as well. Exxon also held the previous record for annual profit, \$39.5 billion, in 2006 as well. At a \$100 a barrel, oil prices are more than 50% higher than a year ago.

These oil company profits translate to fuel pump prices hovering at levels 266% higher than they were a mere five years ago. Auto manufacturers continue to make cars with the same fuel efficiency levels as existed in the 1970s. The spike in gas prices – which easily meant an increase in commuting costs of several hundred dollars a month for many of our island residents – was surely a factor in businesses having a lower profitability, dairies deciding to close, and homeowners making monthly mortgage payments. Our own ability to meet living

and operating expenses should push consumers and businesses to join the environmentalists in getting off the dependence on fossil fuels.

## FORT WEAVER ROAD WIDENING

At a community meeting on February 4, the State Department of Transportation and Hawaiian Dredging updated Ewa residents on the \$60 million Fort Weaver Road widening project. The first segment of the widening to West Loch Fairways should be open by October 2008. The next segment to Renton Road is expected to be completed by March of 2009. Thus, within 13 months, there will be a significant improvement in the traffic flow during the morning and afternoon rush hours. The full widening to Geiger Road will be done by the fall or winter of 2009. With the completion of the North-South Road by the end of 2009, major traffic relief for Ewa residents will become a reality.

## "I DON'T EAT ANYTHING THAT HAD A FACE OR A MOTHER"

One of the more memorable lines from testimony heard during one of the Legislature's many hearings this Session, that one on a bill that would require vegan offerings in DOE school lunches. Now in full swing, all of the hundreds of ideas introduced in the Legislature this session have been referred to their subject matter committees. Bills that touched on three different subject areas ("triple referral") should already have been heard. February 14 is the deadline to move out bills that affect two subjects ("double referral").

One of my priorities as Chair of the Senate Public Safety Committee is SB 2546, which clarifies the mandatory nature of Act 8 (SB 932). This directs the Governor to bring home prisoners who are in the last year of their sentence so they can participate in re-entry programs that enhance their ability to stay straight after completing their terms. Public safety dictates that the corrections system do what it can to help ex-convicts turn their lives around, away from using crime as a means of getting by to becoming a law abiding, productive citizen. Act 8, which the Legislature passed in 2007, funds programs that rehabilitate through job training, housing assistance, family support, and other aspects of successful re-integration into the community. Without this help getting straightened out, prisoners run a higher risk of simply continuing their pattern of making bad decisions. Protection of the public demands that we invest in reintegration programs that incorporate cognitive restructuring to help people identify and correct their errors in thinking. These programs help law breakers make better decisions and become contributing community members.

## COMMERCIAL AVIATION TRAINING AT KALAELOA

Sorry, Maverick wanna-bes still have to apply for, be accepted, and go to Top Gun school on the mainland, but the Legislature is trying to encourage the flight training industry in Hawaii. SB 2088, which I introduced, would add flight schools to those businesses eligible for enterprise zone tax incentives. Commercial aviation training schools would get significant tax credits and exemptions. The bill covers instruction for pilots, dispatchers, mechanics or air traffic controllers. Alteon Training, a subsidiary of Boeing, has expressed an interest in this initiative.

## ALZHEIMERS TASK FORCE

Families of Alzheimer's patients know the changes that Alzheimers Disease brings. Another bill I introduced, SB 2545, would study the feasibility of establishing an Alzheimer's research center within the John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM). Medical research centers already within JABSOM have a track record of providing hope and options for patients, who are able to participate in pioneering treatment studies. Besides the benefits to patients, research centers offer high paying, high skilled jobs for those interested in medical research, and bring in research dollars into our local economy.