

## FIREWORKS AND OTHER HOT ITEMS

February 2009

New Year's Eve was ablaze with the booms and lights of illegal aerials. While some residents may enjoy the bright colors, many others are bothered by the loud sounds that interrupt their sleep or the air pollution that makes it hazardous to drive and difficult to breathe.

The enormous presence of the illegal aerials demonstrates a widespread disregard of the law. While illegal drugs may be grown or manufactured locally, illegal aerials enter through our ports from manufacturing bases abroad, and that presents a grave concern. Contraband arriving in our harbors and escaping detection, then making its way to the end consumer is a major security breach. If banned fireworks can reach the people who light their fuses, what is to stop dirty bombs from reaching the people who would detonate them to even more harm than the aerials do?

My committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs encompasses civil defense. I recently questioned our state Department of Transportation harbor officials about this loophole in the product stream. We will be working on this for the protection of Hawaii residents.

The Legislature is considering several bills on fireworks, among them: SB 2, which would ban fireworks except for religious or cultural purposes; SB 1059, which would establish an illegal fireworks task force to stop the importation of illegal fireworks and explosives; and SB 1060, which would increase the permit fees associated with using and importing fireworks. At the hearings, held by my Committee this week, many testified in favor of the bills.

### *Can You Give Me Something to Take for This, Doctor?*

PhD or MD, is there a difference in ability to prescribe medicine to treat psychiatric disorders?

The psychologists' prescriptive rights bill is once again before the Legislature, drawing psychiatrists and psychologists out of their offices to visit lawmakers and educate them on the issue. The advocacy is passionate and admirable on both sides.

The medical doctors are opposed to granting psychologists the right to prescribe psychotropic drugs on the grounds of patient safety. They say that psychologists simply cannot acquire the medical training to ensure that the patient's health will not be compromised. Psychologists may not be aware of drug interactions with the patient's other medications or medical condition, they say. They will not have the experience to identify adverse reactions or contraindications.

Psychologists, on the other hand, point to problems with access to care. There are many patients who need mental health treatment that requires medication, who live in areas where

there is an unavailability of psychiatrists. Psychologists who work in the health care clinics are often the only source of mental health treatment for these residents. Patients are unable or hard pressed, financially or otherwise, to go to a psychiatrist for their prescriptions.

The debate has lasted for more than a decade. Last year I voted with the psychiatrists, but this Session I am keeping an open mind and am willing to listen to the arguments.

### Civil unions

The civil union bill is back. Persons in favor and against the issue have sent their comments to legislative e-mails and telephones. It has passed the House and is now in the Senate. The arguments are familiar, and this issue will heat up.

### Dogfighting

– And I don't mean the scraps "Dog" Chapman gets into hunting people down. Dog fighting is, surprisingly, on the agenda. Testimony on the bill in the Senate Judiciary Committee was interesting, on the one hand saying that it's a cultural issue and people need to get together to work things out. Opponents of dog fighting pointed to the strong link to domestic violence shown by criminal justice research. I, personally, am against animal cruelty, and have in the past sponsored bills against chicken fighting. Would many of you even know that dog fighting took place in Hawaii and it was already a crime?

### On the lighter side

The pit bull bill generated a lot of e-mail and took down a few trees in massive, mass faxes, but there was never any serious impetus for it.

Amusingly, the ban for pocket knives also generated a fair amount of e-mail but we didn't want to disenfranchise the Boy Scout vote, so the bill won't go anywhere.

### Filipino World War II Veterans

One note on the fireworks on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C.: President Obama's Stimulus package contains funds for payments to Filipino World War II veterans. As you are aware, Republican opposition to the bill poses a threat to the bill. Please join me in supporting President Obama's proposal by contacting members of Congress to ask for their vote in favor of the bill.