Alewa Heights Kalihi

Kalihi Valley Moanalua Gardens Moanalua Valley Kapalama Red Hill Halawa Heights

communit bulletin Volume Fall 202 Volume 37, No. 2 Fall 2020

Aloha, Friends and Neighbors

What a time it's been!

Aiea

Elections

The election was our first foray into all-mail voting. It appears to have gone well and will give us a headstart for the all-important General Election on Tuesday, November 3.

Anticipated mail delays have led the Elections Office to advance the ballot mailout.

Ballots will be mailed to voters about October 5, for receipt by October 16. Voters are advised to put their completed and signed ballots in the mail by October 27 or drop them off at the special elections drop box. Call the City Clerk at 768-3800 with questions.

Five years have passed since I first proposed legislation to authorize all-mail voting as a means of encouraging greater citizen participation in our democracy. The Legislature eventually warmed to the idea and Kauai County was qualified to hold an all-mail election beginning in 2020. However, with the steadily increasing popularity of mail-in absentee voting, the Legislature decided to broaden the law last year to include the entire state. The outbreak of the pandemic made that timing fortuitous.

With voter turnout in recent years hovering around a very poor 40-percent mark, this year's Primary Election had 795,000 registered voters, with participation by over 406,000. While the sheer numbers were remarkable for a primary contest according to elections officials, it still represented a turnout of just 51.1 percent. Although that was a good sign, we need to find new ways to urge more citizens to vote.

Mahalo to You

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your confidence in my representation and your steadfast support throughout my years of service to you.

I was unopposed in to the pandemic. We then recessed again and reconvened on June 22 to complete our work, officially adjourning on July 10.

Much uncertainty lies ahead for state decisionmakers, but in the meantime I'm providing a recap of some of the measures we approved this year elsewhere in this newsletter and in the "Community Survey."

From the onset of this crisis, we have met with government officials to scrutinize the state's responses, assess their effectiveness in safeguarding public health, and press our leaders for quick and decisive action. While our committee continues to be advisory, we have been very candid in our recommendations and sharing your concerns and ours with the executive branch.

The committee's key accomplishments are depicted



below and in the "Hot Seat" on page 3, along with a comparison of how the federal relief funding was apportioned. For complete details on the committee's work on all phases of the pandemic, visit capitol.hawaii.gov and click on the "Senate Special Committee on COVID-19" link.

Our work is far from over as the pandemic continues to spread in ever larger numbers throughout our community. I urge you to follow public health protocols, wear a face mask in public, practice social distancing, and never let your guard down. Unless we all seriously follow these protocols, we will not succeed in stopping this pandemic.

Looking Ahead

Preliminary estimates project the state government will experience a loss of \$2.3 billion in tax revenue over the next two fiscal years. Tax revenue projections are expected to decline by 25 percent beginning in July, compounding a 7-percent drop, about \$483 million, for the year that just ended June 30.

Although these estimates will likely change, the governor does have the power to restrict and cut spending until the Legislature meets to take up the budget for the next fiscal biennium. Additionally, the pandemic's impact on the visitor industry will reduce the hotel room tax revenues that are shared with the counties and fund many state programs. In closing, I encourage you to choose the people who will best repre-

the Primary Election and 71 percent of the with vote was reelected outright SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 to the Senate, thanks to you. While I was not campaigning door-to-door or sign-waving due to the pandemic, I was busy working with the Senate Special Committee on COVID-19, as well as preparing for the 2021 session, which promises to be another difficult session.

Legislature

You'll recall that our legislative session was suspended in mid-March but resumed briefly a month later to authorize a number of spending bills, many to respond of students & faculty returning for face-to-face instruction.

public schools until the Department

of Education could ensure the safety

resources were utilized to rapidly scale up existing contact tracing operations.

Pushed to ensure that the

necessary partnerships &

SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON COVID-19

These graphics provide month-by-month highlights of the work of the Senate Special Committee on COVID-19 in fighting the pandemic.

Pandemic Response

The Senate established a six-member Special Committee on COVID-19, of which I am one, to exercise oversight of the state government's responses to the crisis. Our mandate included overseeing the state government's actions, assessing plans and procedures, and disseminating information to the public.

sent you in public office.

Once again, I am very grateful for your support.

Aloha,

Dune merudo Ki

Donna Mercado Kim Senator, District 14



Community Survey Results

Mahalo for participating in our annual community survey on matters before the Legislature and community. Your input was welcome and helpful in shaping Senator Kim's views on the many bills that were under consideration during the session.

Many of the proposals were not heard or were shelved because of the urgent need by the Legislature to respond to the pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. The results of the survey are provided below.

Autonomous Vehicles

LEGISLATURE

2020

With autonomous vehicles hitting our roadways in greater numbers, nearly half the states have adopted legislation regulating their use. Tests have demonstrated that driverless vehicles are safer and experience fewer accidents because they are not subject to human error.

We asked, how likely are you to ride in a driverless vehicle?

9% Very likely **35%** Somewhat likely **50%** Not at all

Senator Kim introduced Senate Bill 3060, calling for the Department of Transportation to establish a regulated autonomous vehicle testing program. The bill was not heard in the Senate. However, a similar measure, House Bill 2590, H.D. 2, S.D., 2, was approved by both houses. It authorizes the DOT to conduct a testing program using any public road, provided that a human driver is present in the vehicle. The department will submit its report to the Legislature before the 2023 session.

Sports Betting

Court rulings have opened the door to legalized sports betting, estimated to take in \$150 billion a year in illegal wagers. Thirteen states and counting have adopted legalized, controlled sports gambling in one form or another. We asked if we should legalize sports betting, with the state government's take going to fund public services.

Should Hawaii offer some form of sports betting?

45% Yes **50%** No

If adopted, where would you like the proceeds to go, e.g., education, housing/ omeless, etc.?

Bulky-Item Pickup

We were curious about residents' reactions to the City and County of Honolulu's switch from scheduled monthly curbside bulky-item pickup to an appointment-only system.

Have you used the new system?

32% Yes

68% No

Was your experience:

26% Favorable **11%** Unfavorable **6%** No opinion

We also asked if there was a noticeable change in curbside trash since the new system was introduced.

33% Increase

23% Decrease

35% No change

The bulky-item appointment system, which began a year ago in metropolitan Honolulu, from Hawaii Kai to Foster Village, was expanded to the entire island beginning July 1. Multi-unit dwellings have two options, each unit making solo appointments or the property/resident manager scheduling appointments for the entire building. Details are available at opala.org.

Automatic Voter Registration

Hawaii requires that citizens wishing to vote must "opt-in," meaning register with the state or county governments. Automatic voter registration, adopted by 17 states and the District of Columbia, means every citizen is registered to vote, unless he/she "opts-out," or declines to become a voter.

We asked if you supported automatic voter registration.

Physician Shortage

The shortage of physicians, particularly on the Neighbor Islands, has generated a number of ideas to attract and retain doctors. We asked readers for their thoughts on how we can develop a pool of medical professionals.

Grant tuition waivers to medical school students who commit to practicing in Hawaii for a certain number of years?

91% Yes **9%** No

If yes, how long should they stay in Hawaii?

3% At least 1 year **27%** Under 5 years 62% More than 5 years

Should we offer cash or housing incentives to attract doctors from elsewhere to practice in rural areas?

67% Yes 32% No

Should we offer tax incentives to hospitals and medical clinics to expand in underserved communities?

79% Yes **17%** No

Other ideas to attract doctors included using revenue from legalized gaming, regulating how insurers pay physicians, forming partnerships with urgent care type operations, supporting University of Hawaii medical school training on other islands besides Oahu, offering tax credits to doctors and other healthcare providers, and extending incentives to nurses and nurse practitioners. The Legislature deliberated on a number of measures that would have supported the attraction or retention of healthcare professionals, particularly in underserved areas of the state. Senate Bill 2983 appropriated an undetermined amount of money for an educational loan repayment program. The proposal passed the Senate but did not pass the House.

and make a 10-year commitment to practice medicine in Hawaii. It passed the House but was not given any hearings by the Senate.

Among the many bills to exempt certain medical services from the general excise tax, Senate Bill 2542 garnered the most support, with approval by the Senate and consideration by the House.

Vaping

While public health officials have urged people to stop using vaping devices, they are still sold and used.

Do you use vaping devices?

0% Yes 100% No

Should the state ban vaping?

67% Yes **30%** No

Should we tax vaping products like cigarettes?

89% Yes 3% No

The Senate approved several measures that would have banned or more tightly regulated vaping and e-liquid products. They were heard by the House but did not win passage. House Bill 2457, H.D. 2, S.D. 2, failed in conference committee. It would have banned the sale of flavored tobacco products, imposed penalties on persons under 21 years from possessing tobacco products or electronic smoking devices, and prohibited the mislabeling of e-liquid products containing nicotine.

Law School Loan Reduction

The University of Hawaii's Richardson School of Law is proposing an educational loan reduction program for law school graduates who commit to working in rural areas, similar to a program offered to certain health professionals.

Would you support this?

The largest proportion of votes went to lower education, road repair, and affordable housing, in that order. Other suggestions included teacher raises, social services, crime prevention, homelessness, services for kupuna, law enforcement, mental health treatment, rail, and Aloha Stadium.

Senator Kim introduced Senate Bill 2571 that proposed the establishment of a task force to examine and make recommendations on the economic feasibility of implementing sports gambling in the state. The bill was not heard by the Senate.

2 community **bulletin**

VOLUME 37, NO. 2 | FALL 2020

74% Yes

20% No

Several proposals were introduced by legislators. Senate Bill 2005, S.D. 1, H.D. 1, was passed by the Senate and reached second reading in the House, but failed to win passage. The bill would have required that any person who is eligible to vote and applies for a new or renewal motor vehicle driver's license, provisional license, or instruction permit, or a new, renewal, or duplicate state identification card be automatically registered to vote if that person is not already registered to vote, unless the applicant declines to be registered to vote.

Senate Bill 2471, which passed second reading in the Senate, would have established a student loan forgiveness program at the University of Hawaii.

House Bill 1977 proposed to create a medical student sponsorship for medical students who graduate from a high-quality but lower-cost school of medicine

67% Yes **30%** No

House Bill 2656 would have created the justice league program to provide partial loan repayments for eligible lawyers who pursue public interest work in Hawaii, as well as loan repayments by the University of Hawaii School of Law. It did not pass.

Donna Mercado Kim | facebook.com/DonnaMercadoKim



I was confused about the various state government responses to the COVID crisis. I think there was a group from the House of Representatives, the governor formed one, and then there was a Senate committee. Can you tell me what's going on?

Yes, there are three committees.

One, the House formed the Select Committee on COVID-19 Economic and Financial Preparedness, which drew representatives from government, business, and the nonprofit sector to provide insights into our economic and financial situation. Their emphasis is on economic and financial preparedness. You can follow the group's progress at capitol.hawaii.gov.

Two, the governor formed an economic recovery committee that crafted a strategy, "Beyond Recovery: Reopening Hawaii." You can read it in full on the governor's website.

Three, the Senate Special Committee on COVID-19 was formed to oversee the state government's responses to the pandemic, with an emphasis on public health and government mandates like transportation and unemployment insurance.

I was named as one of six members, and beginning in March, our COVID committee met regularly with public health officials and medical experts, transportation and travel executives, Labor Department administrators, business and community leaders, and others involved in the crisis response.

We pushed and urged the governor to implement various measures to help curb the spread of the virus, as described on the front page. However, our work hasn't ended, and we continue to meet regularly to assess and evaluate what further measures should be implemented for the protection and safety of our citizens.

CARES Allocations

The Legislature approved Senate Bill 126, the Ige administration's proposals to use some of the \$600 million-plus allocated to Hawaii under the federal Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. However, after the budget was approved, the governor vetoed several key spending items in the bill. I've provided a comparison of the two.

With Congress failing to act on unemployment benefits, Governor Ige submitted a request to the

CARES Allocations

This table compares how the CARES money was appropriated by the Legislature (left column) and what remained (right column) after Governor Ige vetoed several major provisions of the legislation. The most significant cuts were his elimination of \$230 million to supplement unemployment insurance benefits for an estimated 117,000 workers, and a reduction of \$50 million in rent relief for about 34,000 families. The governor said he vetoed the UI money pending Congressional action on national pandemic relief. The Legislature has the option of reconvening to appropriate the remaining money, which

federal government for \$300 a week in extended UI benefits available through the Federal Emergency Management Agency. That request has been approved.

Another effort underway on Oahu is the COVID-19 Hardship Relief program, which will provide residents with amounts up to \$1,000 a month for certain household expenses and up to \$500 a month for childcare. Benefits will last for six months. This is a public-private partnership that includes the City and County of Honolulu, Aloha United Way, Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, Helping Hands Hawaii, and other social service agencies.

Health Agency Site Visit

With public health leaders providing conflicting information on the adequacy of the contact tracing operation, our committee paid a visit to the Department of Health for a first-hand look at what it was doing. The governor and health director later accused us of "unauthorized entry," ignoring "security protocols," exposing private health information, and other misdeeds.

The fact is that we didn't bully our way into the agency. The agency is in a public building with no security system that can't be found in any other facility. We were shown to State epidemiologist Dr. Sarah Park's office, and she met, welcomed, and chaperoned us through the building. An employee was always escorting us and we only wanted to know about staffing and workloads, not private health information.

What our visit achieved was to expose the truth, that we do not have enough contact tracers—as we suspected—despite what Health officials have said publicly, and that the ones we do have are overwhelmed by the increasing number of cases.

Our committee inspected the Convention Center on August 28 to meet with mayor General Kenneth Hara, state adjutant general, and Dr. Emily Roberson, new head of contact tracing, on an accelerated effort. Our committee had insisted the administration bolster its lagging contact tracing, just as we had done with the unemployment insurance backlog. We were glad to see that it's been scaled up in just two weeks; imagine where we'd be if the administration had shown more urgency when our COVID numbers were still low.

As a result of positive coronavirus cases hovering in triple digit numbers, the governor and mayor



The Senate COVID committee visited the Daniel K. Inouye International Airport and met with Transportation Administrator Ford Fuchigami for a briefing and inspection of travel safety protocols. Attending were (from left) Jarrett Keohokalole, Chair Donovan Dela Cruz, Sharon Moriwaki, Michelle Kidani, Fuchigami, Donna Mercado Kim, and Kurt Fevella.

issued stay-at-home/work-from-home orders and conducted a mass testing program on Oahu to slow the spread of COVID. After a four-week lockdown, the Mayor announced that certain designated businesses and operations on Oahu could re-open by following specific guidelines as detailed in "Honolulu's COVID-19 Recovery Framework."The Recovery Framework would allow businesses and operations to re-open in a limited capacity, while complying with specific operational guidelines that include allowing all persons in these establishments to maintain physical/social distancing and health and safety standards, all based on a 4-tier system. The tiered system is meant to be a more strategic approach to ensuring continuity of life amidst the pandemic. The governor also announced that tourism would reopen on October 15, with travelers required to pass pre-arrival virus testing in order to avoid quarantining upon reaching Hawaii.

In other developments, Health Director Bruce Anderson and Public Safety Director Nolan Espinda both announced they were leaving their posts. Anderson had faced criticism for the contact tracing effort and Espinda for the outbreak at Oahu Community Correctional Center. Additionally, epidemiologist Dr. Park went on paid leave. Let's hope new leadership will jumpstart the tracing effort.

Rest assured that the Senate committee will continue to assess the responses of the state government, ensure the federal CARES money reaches its designated recipients, and monitor our progress in combatting the pandemic.

I will be keeping you posted of our work.

CARES Spending Comparison	Legislature	Governor
Unemployment Insurance Plus	230	0
Rent Relief	100	50
Personal Protective Equipment: Purchase	100	61
Personal Protective Equipment: Local Source Grants	15	10
Traveler Screening, Testing	90	70
Business Development	36	10
Childcare Facility Subsidies	15	15
Food Distribution	5	5
Fishing Industry Subsidy	3	3
Class of 2020 Education Support	2	1
	10	10

40 40 636 265

\$53 Million for District Schools, Facilities

The 2020 Legislature authorized funding for many school, public facility, and community projects for Senator Kim's 14th District.

SCHOOLS Aiea High School

\$5.4 million to design and construct a girls athletic locker room and weight training facility.\$600,000 to regrade a hillside and site improvements.

Dole Middle School

\$4 million to design and construct a student learning enrichment and activity area.\$300,000 to remove architectural barriers.

Farrington High School

\$2.5 million for accessibility and other site improvements.

\$875,000 to replace the gym bleachers. \$300,000 to replace railings in two buildings.

Fern Elementary School

\$1.57 million to replace the fire alarm system and make other improvements.\$225,000 for a campus drainage system.Funds Released

Kapalama Elementary School

\$1.68 million for accessibility improvements.\$75,000 for building designs and demolition of a cottage.

\$50,000 for recarpeting.

Likelike Elementary School

\$1.68 million to accessibility improvements. \$120,000 to demolish a cottage and make other site improvements.

Linapuni Elementary School

\$800,000 for a covered walkway between the cafeteria and another building and repaying the faculty parking lot.

Moanalua Elementary School \$100,000 for electrical and air-conditioning upgrades.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Donna Mercado Kim | facebook.com/DonnaMercadoKim



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Moanalua High School

\$3.175 million for Title IX improvements on the softball field and various other construction and equipment.

\$2.1 million to replace the stadium light poles.

\$1.5 million for accessibility improvements. \$750,000 to design a new athletic facility, including a girls locker room, training and meeting rooms, and storage.

Moanalua Middle School

\$1.5 million to construct a central, covered dropoff/pickup area for students. Funds Released

Red Hill Elementary School \$3 million for a covered playcourt.

Shafter Elementary School

A total of \$6 million for campus improvements, to include replacement facilities or campus relocation, as required for federal financial support.

Webling Elementary School

\$1.5 million for the expansion of the administration and library building. Funds Released

\$600,000 to resurface the parking lot.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Bishop Museum

\$900,000 for fire safety improvements, including fire sprinklers.

De Corte Neighborhood Park

A total of \$400,000 to construct and equip senior wellness programs, to be partially matched by funding from the City and County of Honolulu.

Halawa Animal Quarantine Station \$150,000 for the removal or remediation of tar-like substances from the grounds and various parking lot and site improvements.

Hawaii Public Housing Authority

School Street Campus \$2.5 million to construct up to 800 affordable housing units for seniors on the authority's School Street campus.

Kalihi Valley District Park

A sum of \$400,000 to construct and equip senior wellness programs, to be partially matched by funding from the City and County of Honolulu.

Lanakila Multi-Purpose Senior Center

\$6.1 million to replace the center and integrate it with the adjacent School Street residential housing renovations.

Kalihi Street

\$2.3 million for pedestrian safety and accessibility improvements on Kalihi Street, between King Street and Dillingham Boulevard.



Senator Helps With Two Farrington Food Drives

Senator Kim returned twice to her alma mater, Farrington High School, to join Principal Al Carganilla, faculty, and students in their "Project Hope" food distributions during the pandemic. In May, they gave away 900 bags of groceries filled with bread, eggs, canned goods, fresh fruit and vegetables, cereal, toilet paper, and chips. Another 1,000 packages were provided at a second event in June. Supporting the effort was Representative Daniel Holt (right of Senator) of Kalihi.





PAID FOR BY FRIENDS OF DONNA MERCADO KIM

1745 Ala Amoamo Street, Honolulu, Hawaii 96819 | facebook.com/DonnaMercadoKim.com



Silvas Recognized for Contributions

KahuWendell Silva and wife Sharon were recognized by the Senate in early February for their work with the Kalihi-Palama Culture & Arts Society. Said Senator Kim, "We're so fortunate to have such wonderful and caring individuals in our community keeping our children involved in learning and perpetuating the Hawaiian culture."

Safety, Education, Jransportation Highlight Session

Several pandemic-related suspensions of the 2020 session did not deter the Legislature from passing a number of measures responding to the COVID-19 crisis, a few key spending requests, and a host of other measures on public safety, motor vehicles, and education.

The complete list of bills awaiting the governor's approval, or already signed into law, is available at: capitol. hawaii.gov/advreports/main.aspx.

Fake Air Bags

Senator Kim introduced **Senate Bill 3158, S.D. 1, H.D. 1**, which will prohibit intentionally or knowingly manufacturing, importing, installing, reinstalling, distributing, selling, or offering for sale any counterfeit supplemental restraint system component, nonfunctional air bag, or air bag that does not meet federal safety requirements, with the intent that such device replace an air bag in any airbag-required motor vehicle. The bill also prohibits selling or installing any device that causes an air-bag-required motor vehicle's diagnostic systems to fail to warn that an air bag is not installed or the vehicle is equipped with a grams. The lion's share went to additional unemployment insurance benefits for an estimated 117,000 unemployed workers and rent relief for 34,000 families. However, Governor Ige vetoed several provisions of the bill (see "Hot Seat" on page 3).

Legislators deferred scheduled salary increases for the legislative, executive, and judicial branches (Act 2) that were to take effect on January 1, 2021.

They also approved **House Bill 2183**, increasing the amount of bonds the state can sell to finance affordable housing across the state.

As this was not a budget session and legislators were dealing with the impact of the pandemic, they did not take up significant new spending proposals.

Education

Senate Bill 3103 establishes a school facilities agency responsible for all public school development, planning, and construction assigned by the Legislature, governor, or Board of Education.

House Bill 1346 prohibits the suspension or expulsion of children participating in the Executive Office on Early Learning's Public Prekindergarten, except under certain circumstances.

Public Safety

Senate Bill 3054 requires gun owners moving firearms out of the state to notify the county police department where the firearm is registered within five days.

House Bill 285 removes the exemption for police officers from the Uniform Information Practices Act and requires county police departments to disclose to the Legislature the identity of officers who have been suspended or discharged.

House Bill 2744 establishes a gun violence and violent crimes commission and makes it a class C felony to purchase, manufacture, or otherwise obtain firearm parts for the purpose of assembling a firearm having no serial number.

Transportation

House Bill 2162 clarifies the duties of towing companies when vehicle owners arrive on the scene and the fees they may charge. The amendment also requires towing companies to accept debit and credit cards.

House Bill 2590 establishes an autonomous vehicles testing pilot program, to be run by the Department of

counterfeit or nonfunctional air bag.

Budget

The unforeseen consequences of the pandemic led to a shutdown of the visitor industry, adversely affected related businesses like restaurants, retailers, and suppliers, and triggered a severe drop in tax revenues derived from those activities, not only in Hawaii but across the nation.

In response, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which appropriated money to the states for relief efforts.

The Legislature promptly approved **Senate Bill 126**, allocating the state's share of the money to various pro-

Transparency in Government

House Bill 361 prohibits the governor and mayors from maintaining other employment, controlling interest in a business, or receiving any emoluments after 65 days of being elected or appointed to office.

Family Leave

House Bill 2148 extends family leave coverage to include care for employees' grandchildren.

Transportation.

House Bill 1676 establishes a two-year, pilot, photo red light imaging detector system program in the City and County of Honolulu.

Vetoes

On August 31, Governor Ige announced his intent to veto six measures that were passed by the Legislature. By September 15, any measure he has not signed or vetoed will become law. Among the vetoes were **House Bill 1523**, authorizing the Department of Education to use CARES money for distance learning equipment, and **House Bill 2124**, regarding post-employment restrictions on former state employees. The Legislature will not meet to override these vetoes.

Donna Mercado Kim | facebook.com/DonnaMercadoKim

4 community bulletin VOLUME 37, NO. 2 | FALL 2020