

REPRESENTATIVE NICOLE LOWEN

Newsletter & Mid-Session Update

Kailua-Kona • Holualoa • Honokohau • Kalaoa



*Aloha
Neighbors,*

The 2020 legislative session is past the halfway point, when House bills cross over to the Senate and Senate bills come to the House. The following pages provide an update on some of the bills that are advancing this session.

It is a privilege to serve as your representative, and together we have accomplished much in recent years. I look forward to continuing to serve, and to dedicate myself toward the betterment of our community and our State.

As always, please reach out if we can assist you in any way!

Mahalo nui loa,

Nicole

Rep. Nicole Lowen

Rep. Lowen Launches Environmental Caucus

To encourage action on pressing environmental issues, Rep. Lowen formed an Environmental Legislative Caucus, which met for the first time in January. More than 30 other legislators have joined as members. “Hawaii is a global leader on environmental, climate, and energy policy,” said Rep. Lowen, “but with the challenges we face today, we need to do more, faster.” Priorities identified by the caucus for the 2020 session include adaptation to sea level rise, resilience to natural disasters, forest and coral reef protection and restoration, reducing the use of fossil fuels in the transportation and energy sectors, and protecting water quality. The formation of this caucus will encourage collaboration and bring renewed focus to the passage of needed environmental legislation.

2020 Census: Why it Matters and How to Participate

The U.S. Census is conducted every 10 years and collects data about population growth and other demographic changes throughout every community in the country. Census data is used to determine how much federal funding flows to the State and how much representation we have in Washington, D.C. Funding for things like schools, health clinics, highways, and fire stations depends on you, and we strongly encourage everyone to participate. All of your information is kept confidential and by law cannot be shared with anyone, even law enforcement agencies. You can complete the census by mail, phone, or online. Visit www.2020census.gov for more information.

CENSUS 2020

How Hawaii residents can prepare for the upcoming Census

The Census determines how many House of Representative Seats and how much federal funding is allocated to each state. Together we can ensure that our state receives the resources it needs.



**MARK YOUR
CALENDARS**

MARCH 12th - 20th

Households will begin receiving official Census Bureau mail with detailed information on how to respond to the 2020 Census.

APRIL 1ST

Census Day is observed nationwide. By this day, every home will receive an invitation to participate.

MAY - JULY

Census officials will begin visiting homes that haven't responded to the 2020 Census to help make sure everyone is counted.

WHAT TO DO:

To respond online or learn more about the 2020 Census, scan the following QR code with your phone or tablet or visit:

2020census.gov/en/ways-to-respond



House Bills Advancing this Session



On a site visit to learn about forest restoration efforts in North Kona

Protecting Our Environment

With growing public concern about the impacts of climate change, threats to natural resources, invasive species, and the need to better manage wastewater and solid waste, there are a record number of bills relating to these topics being considered this session. **HB2699** would require the transition of all state vehicle fleets to clean transportation alternatives by 2035. **HB1856** ends the use of coal to generate electricity in Hawaii. **HB2151** establishes a program to assist low- and moderate-income property owners with the costs of converting failing cesspools.

Preserving Kona Coffee

Preserving the reputation, quality, and value of Kona coffee is very important for Hawaii Island’s farmers. **HB1886** would increase the minimum requirement of Kona coffee in Kona blend products from 10% to 51%. This bill was deferred in the House but similar Senate bills are still moving. Rep. Lowen also introduced **HB1861** to extend assistance to farmers for the treatment costs to combat the destructive coffee berry borer beetle.



Visiting with Miss Kona Coffee at the Capitol



The Keakealani Building in Kealahou which was formerly the Kona Courthouse

Renovation of the Keakealani Building

The House draft of the supplemental budget bill includes \$750,000 in Capital Improvement Project funding for the renovation of the Keakealani Building. The building would be renovated for use as a residential treatment facility to provide beds for individuals needing to be stabilized before entering long-term treatment programs for substance abuse and mental health issues. This is an important step in addressing our homelessness issues in Kona.

Treating Little Fire Ants

In recent months, little fire ants have continued to spread across the State, with populations now found on Hawaii Island, Oahu, Maui, and Kauai. **HB1854** outlines best practices for treatment of little fire ants by pest control operators. **HB1849** provides resources for an additional extension agent position at the Hawaii Ant Lab West Hawaii Office to increase capacity for addressing little fire ant infestations.



Visiting with Hawaii Island Teach For America teachers & alumni

Stopping Youth Vaping

Growing concerns over the health impacts of youth vaping has led to bills to curtail underage usage in the State. **HB2457** aims to ban flavored tobacco products, which are how most kids start using and then get hooked on vaping and nicotine use. In 2018, the United States Surgeon General declared electronic cigarette use among youth an epidemic.



Visiting with Senator Kanuha on Opening Day



Rep. Lowen helping out with story time at Kealakehe Elementary

Access to Early Learning

Finding affordable childcare is an ongoing challenge faced by families across the State. **HB2543** sets the ambitious goal of providing access to childcare and early learning to all 3- and 4- year-olds in the State by 2030. This bill also expands Preschool Open Doors eligibility and funding, and designates state-owned sites and all university campuses as places that will provide space to incorporate early learning centers.

Homelessness and Mental Health

Hawaii continues to face one of the worst homeless epidemics in the country. A few focus areas for legislation this session have been increasing the availability of affordable housing and mental health services. **HB2183** helps to fund affordable rental housing. **HB2411** creates a Rent Supplement Program. **HB2707** offers scholarships to UH for degrees in social work to those willing to commit to working in the State for five years. **HB2522** requires the Dept. of Health to increase the availability of services to patients with mental health and substance abuse conditions.



Meeting with UH Students



The bi-partisan Hawaii Women's Legislative Caucus discussing the 2020 package

Women's Legislative Caucus Bills

This session, the Women's Legislative Caucus introduced a package of 36 bills and 20 resolutions covering a broad range of topics, including improving safety on college campuses, establishing a task force focused on preventing and responding to violence against women, expanding resources and programs for victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking, including children, improving access to women's health services, and eliminating gender-based discrimination and pay inequity in the workplace.



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Stay Up-To-Date About Coronavirus

As the number of cases of COVID-19 worldwide continues to rise, it is important to stay informed about any advisories from the State Department of Health. Visit www.health.hawaii.gov for up-to-date and accurate information about any developments in the State of Hawaii. The Centers For Disease Control and Prevention website is also a good source and can be found at www.cdc.gov.

Majority Caucus Bills Seek to Address High Cost of Living and Shortages of Housing & Childcare

Before the start of the legislative session this year, the House, Senate, Governor, and community leaders introduced a legislative package focused on addressing the high cost of living across the State, creating a Hawaii where working families can make a living and thrive. These bills will increase affordable housing stock, expand availability of and lower the cost of childcare, provide tax relief for working families, and increase the minimum wage.

This package was the result of the ALICE Report that was released last year, which provided an overview of economic hardships faced by Hawaii residents that are “asset limited, income constrained, and employed.” The ALICE Report found that 47% of Hawaii households are barely able to provide for the five basic essentials of housing, childcare, food, transportation, and healthcare.

HB2541 will provide over \$70 million annually in tax relief by making the Earned Income Tax Credit refundable and increasing the food/excise tax credit by 36%. **HB2543** sets forth a plan to provide all 3 and 4 year olds access to early learning by the year 2030. **SB3104** makes state land available for the development of for-sale, 99-year leasehold housing, and authorizes \$275 million in bond funding for infrastructure and housing development.

