



MidWeek

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Our session has adjourned

The 2017 Legislative session adjourned on schedule last week. Debate about the funding formula to support the city's rail project dominated the final few days of our deliberations, and no consensus emerged. The House proposed a plan that relied on a substantial increase to the hotel room tax, which the visitor industry strongly opposed, and which Mayor Caldwell said would still require a property tax increase. The Senate did not agree, and proposed to extend the half-percent surcharge on the general excise tax – which Oahu residents have already been paying. In the end, no agreement was in sight, and future funding to complete the rail system is now in limbo.

While there was some talk about extending the session for a few extra days – or calling the Legislature back into a special session – the Governor declared that at this point, it would be “a waste of time” for him to do so.



Unfortunately, the rail discussion overshadowed many of the positives that we accomplished, especially for our public school students. I am pleased that the budget includes funds for the state's Early College Initiative so that this program can be implemented on additional campuses statewide. There is also an appropriation to implement the Keiki Healthy and Ready to Learn health assessment and monitoring program in schools beyond the very successful pilot phase. We are also providing funds for a “Hawaii Promise” initiative that will supplement financial aid for UH students.

I am so pleased that our 13,500 public school teachers reached an agreement with the state on their new four-year contract. The long-overdue salary increases and improvements to health benefits should help to retain qualified teachers, and perhaps serve as an incentive for still others to enter the teaching profession. There is still work to be done to make this happen. I included in the budget tuition assistance to support teacher education that we all hope will support many hundreds of current substitute teachers who may wish to take the next steps to earn their teacher licenses. These funds would be for cohort classes taught after school at UH West Oahu. And in another effort to help teachers, we also passed a bill to transfer city lands on thirteen Oahu high school campuses to the state for possible use for teacher housing.

The budget also funds several construction projects for schools in our area. In addition to ongoing repair and maintenance work, here are some other projects worth noting:

- ◆ Mililani High School - \$2 million for planning for a Performing Arts Center; \$350,000 to Planning for enclosing a courtyard and extending an existing building
- ◆ Mililani Middle School - \$11.5 million for a 15-classroom building. This is a major step Toward moving MMS off the multi-track school schedule back to the standard school year calendar.

The school year draws to a close

Congratulations to the nearly 600 members of the Mililani High School Class of 2017 who will receive diplomas on May 13 at Aloha Stadium. At last count, 46 seniors are eligible to graduate as valedictorians. That means earning a GPA of 4.0 or higher and fulfilling the requirements of at least one Honors Recognition Certificate.



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As the sports season comes to an end, we're also keeping a close eye on the Trojan Boys Varsity Volleyball Team. At the time this column is being prepared, the boys had won the OIA Championship, and were undefeated heading into the state tournament.

Mahalo for a great season – hoping the best for you in the States!

