



MidWeek

This column by Senator Michelle Kidani
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Graduation season!

We are navigating through the graduation season this month with all of its multiple opportunities to celebrate with the young men and women in the Class of 2016 who have worked hard to earn their diplomas and degrees. Sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, nephews and nieces – even moms and dads and husbands and wives – can all celebrate this milestone. It's one of life's unforgettable experiences.

At its Spring Commencement ceremony this past weekend, UH West Oahu marked the 40th anniversary of its establishment as part of the ten-campus UH system. The always-energetic Interim Chancellor Doris Ching presided as the campus graduated another large class, with 242 students receiving diplomas, certificates and other marks of program completion. Keynote speaker was Hawaii Supreme Court Chief Justice, Mark Recktenwald, and the UHWO landmark campus courtyard was appropriately festive for the occasion.



Later this month, Waipahu High School seniors and supporters will take over the Blaisdell Center Arena for their graduation ceremony. At last count, about 530 seniors will be honored for their work. And amazingly, just over 25 percent of these graduates have already earned college credits through Waipahu's highly acclaimed early college dual credit program. Waipahu's Principal Keith Hayashi reports with pride that eighteen members of the Class of 2016 have qualified as valedictorians – the highest number ever. Congratulations, everyone, for jobs well done!

2016 Legislative session pau

In the week that this edition of West Oahu VOICE is being prepared, the legislative session was headed toward adjournment on Thursday, May 5. The final few days of the session include approval of dozens of bills and the state budget spending plan for the year beginning July first. Here are a few notes:

The Legislature made a major commitment of \$100 million for the Department of Education to undertake an aggressive program to provide air conditioning for as many as 1,000 classrooms. We all know that many of the schools most severely impacted by rising temperatures are in the arid West Oahu area, and we can now say that relief is on the way. A related bill would require the DOE to take advantage of energy savings options – including other methods of heat-abatement – to become a “net-zero” energy user within the next 20 years.

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Soon after the Legislature adjourned, Governor Ige signed the bill that funds air conditioning for hundreds of public school classrooms

I am pleased to note that the budget includes the sum of **\$10 million for the Pre-school Open Doors** program, and that additional support positions for the Executive Office on Early Learning were approved as well. We must make good on the Legislature's promise to establish pre-K programs for as many of our keiki as we can, as so many other states have done as an investment in the future.

The Legislature also agreed with me that it's time to do a formal study to determine whether or not it is feasible to invest in an **inter-island ferry system**.

One measure that we all worked very hard to refine would have, I believe, resolved issues with teacher travel when accompanying students on educational trips by amending the ethics law. The final bill was a version of HB 1713 that originated in the House, and my Senate colleagues and I were ready to pass this important bill out of the conference committee. But the House conferees did not want to send the bill forward for final votes. Some expressed hope that new members of the Ethics Commission would re-examine the Commission's earlier position on this matter to the benefit of our students. I must say I was disappointed that we must now rely on 'opinion' rather than statute.

In addition, I'm pleased to report that funds have been allocated in the budget for a number of construction projects that will impact area residents. These include schools and two community organizations that are integral parts of our community:

- ◆ \$500,000 for a new portable classroom at **Waipio's Kanoelani Elementary**
- ◆ \$5.5 million for campus-wide electrical upgrades at **Waipahu High School**
- ◆ \$35 million for a new Creative Media facility at **UH West Oahu**
- ◆ \$200,000 for renovation of plantation structures at **Waipahu's Hawaii Plantation Village**

Over the next few weeks, I will be reporting to our Neighborhood Boards, and using these MidWeek columns to discuss our work in the last several months. I always look forward to opportunities for community meetings to answer your questions and hear your concerns. Please don't hesitate to call or write – and if you are lucky enough to be able to get some time off during the summer months, enjoy!