

**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**

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REVISED 3/12/08

Statement of
THEODORE E. LIU
Director
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism
before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TAXATION
Thursday, March 20, 2008
1:15 P.M.
State Capitol, Conference Room 224

in consideration of
**REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
AND TOURISM TO ESTABLISH A STATEWIDE INTERFAITH STEERING
COMMITTEE.**

Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Espero and Members of the Senate Committee:

The Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism (DBEDT) has serious concerns over SCR5, which establishes a statewide interfaith steering committee within DBEDT to develop and promote interfaith activities to further relations between various religious faiths. The committee is also being asked to explore the possibility of organizing a major international conference in Hawaii to place by 2011. While appreciating the intent of this Resolution, we respectfully suggest that there could be better expertise elsewhere in working with the religious, social and volunteer sectors of our community. In addition, DBEDT notes that a non-profit organization would be better equipped to lead and administer the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments.

testimony

From: Saleem Ahmed [ahmedinhawaii@aol.com]
Sent: Wednesday, March 19, 2008 10:04 AM
To: testimony
Subject: Testimny for SCR 5

MEMORANDUM

DATE: 18 MARCH 2008
TO: SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TAXATION (EDT)
ATTN: SEN. CAROL FUKUNAGA, CHAIR
SEN. WILL ESPERO, VICE CHAIR
FROM: MERRITT T SAKATA
RE: WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 5
TWENTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE, 2008

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

I regret that business obligations do not permit me to attend your hearing on the above matter to deliver my testimony in person.

I have been a participant in the activities of the All-Believers Network since summer 2005, when I first learned of its existence while helping plan an Interfaith Weekend for World Peace. This activity was sponsored by Seicho-No-Ie Hawaii, a non-denominational religious movement dedicated to fostering enlightenment and world peace founded on the understanding that despite any seemingly unique or even apparently conflicting characteristics "all faiths/religions" emanate from a single universal truth that "all mankind (or for that matter, all that exists) have a common spiritual origin or foundation" in "divinity".

And while my expressions and testimony are that of a "practitioner" and not a "representative" of that organization, I believe the implementation of the proposed initiative will provide an opportunity to achieve long-lasting and far-reaching impacts that will further those same ends.

While the kind of harmony we all seek will not arise simply by convening of committees. It is not likely to be attained at all without such opportunities that invite if not mandate people of good-will from backgrounds of all types and in particular the various systems of ethics and morality to work on joint projects requiring interaction, discourse and cooperation.

We see in the world around our islands, a "warlike" mentality being condoned if not encouraged by well-intentioned but typically yet imperfect persons and sometimes institutions of ethics and faith. While such has been the case for almost all of recorded history, we must conclude that such patterns once seen as virtue and loyalty in past eras and generations to perceived threats from "foreign barbarian" cultures coveting land, resources, fealty by the populace and other temporal concerns were understandable if not necessarily justified. However as has been experienced here, such can no longer be relied upon. In these times when universal prosperity and harmony are almost completely linked to intercultural and inter-religious respect, interchange and even inter-marriage between enemies of former eras, our shared world needs another pattern to be demonstrated and considered.

While the residue from injustices perpetrated sometimes in the guise of faith in past eras continue to be manifest among the peoples of Hawaii, there are few if any places in the world where the degree of transcendence so far attained here has been experienced or duplicated.

Certainly, much more must yet be accomplished by and among our own populace for us to be considered the kind of perfect example that we might prefer, but that does not diminish the fact that we the myriad peoples of Hawaii may be doing the world to observe us in that

continuing process.

For that reason alone, independent of any economic benefits that may yet derive from such efforts, it seems that the implementation of the initiative proposed by the resolution should be adopted.

I may be reached at my office or cellphone: 284-0009, in the unlikely event that these comments require further clarification.

Thank you!

Saleem Ahmed

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 5
TWENTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE, 2008
Senate Committee on Economic Development and Taxation (EDT)

Testimony of Saleem Ahmed, Ph.D.
President, All Believers Network
Phone: 808/371-9360
Honolulu, March 20, 2008

EDT Chair Sen. Carol Fukunaga, Vice Chair Sen. Will Espero and members of the Senate Committee on Economic Development and Taxation:

My name is Saleem Ahmed, and I am president of the All Believers Network (Belnet), a Hawaii-based tax-exempt non-profit organization promoting inter-faith harmony. Our board comprises members from the following 13 religions and philosophies: Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hawaiian Spirituality, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Subud, Sufism, Unitarian Universalism and Zoroastrianism. We seek board members from other religions as well. Our three annual symposia thus far have each drawn 100+ people, all exploring commonalities across religions and trying to see how we can help bring peace to our troubled world, torn apart by religious friction.

While an over-emphasis of inter-religious differences and "holier than thou" attitudes have often led in the past to religion-based violence around the world, we believe that an appreciation of the hitherto ignored inter-religious similarities can help promote global peace. Thus, we wholeheartedly support SCR 5. This support is based on the following three important inter-related reasons:

1. Substantively: The working together in Hawaii on this project of people from different religions, all motivated by the earnest desire to explore ways to utilize religion as a vehicle for peace, will underscore to the world the tremendous interfaith aloha that resonates throughout

Hawaii and blesses our citizenry. This will help reinforce Hawaii as the *World's Interfaith Harmony Capital*;

2. Revenue-Generation: The organization in Hawaii of this conference will undoubtedly bring to Hawaii another “type” of visitor – religious followers who may have hitherto steered away from this tropical Paradise because of our fame as a destination for music, dance and fun. We will thus have an opportunity to showcase that our music, dance and fun is based on the tremendous spirituality that permeates the soul of Hawaii, thereby potentially opening up an untapped source of additional tourist dollars in years to come; and

3. While maintaining separation of church and state, the organization of this proposed precedent-setting conference will demonstrate that “religion” is not a taboo word for state-supported activities. After all, the conference will not be about any particular religion, but about how a dispassionate discussion of commonalities across religions could help counter religion-based violence. In this way, we believe it will be similar to other important revenue-generating events the state has supported in the past.

Thus, Sen. Fukunaga, Sen. Espero and members of this committee, we hope you will approve SCR5. We thank you for providing this opportunity for public input into your decision-making. The All Believers Network and many other organizations we work with, from some of which you might also be receiving testimony supporting SCR 5, will provide full cooperation in helping make this dream come true.

Thank you.

Saleem Ahmed

To: Committee on Economic Development and Taxation

Re: Testimony for Senate Concurrent Resolution 5 (SCR 5)

From: Gary T. Tashiro, President
Seicho-No-Ie Hawaii
1333 Matlock Avenue
Honolulu, HI 96814

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Seicho-No-Ie Hawaii, I extend my full support for Senate Concurrent Resolution 5 to establish a State-wide Interfaith Steering Committee.

One of the basic tenets of Seicho-No-Ie states that believers resolve to transcend all religious differences and to live in accordance with the laws of life. We believe that all religions emanate from one source and that all living things are connected by a life force that comes from a higher being.

With the enactment of SCR 5, people of all religions and faiths will be provided a mechanism by which they can work to transcend differences and come together to find common grounds, thereby bringing us closer toward achieving world peace. By forming a cooperative group that can develop and promote interfaith activities in the state of Hawaii, we believe that Hawaii can demonstrate to the rest of the country and the world that interfaith harmony can become a reality.

Thank you very much for your positive consideration of this measure.

testimony

From: Awesomepossm@aol.com
Sent: Tuesday, March 18, 2008 10:39 AM
To: testimony
Cc: Ahmedinhawaii@aol.com; revsky@unityhawaii.org
Subject: SCR 5 Testimony from Unity Church of Hawaii



UNITY CHURCH OF HAWAII

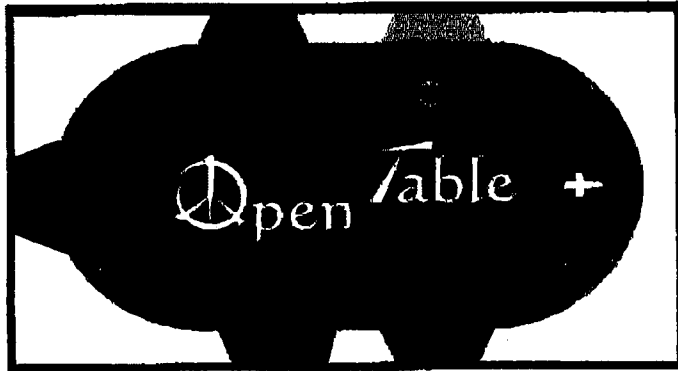
3608 DIAMOND HEAD CIRCLE
HONOLULU, HI 96815
PHONE: (808) 735-4436
FAX: (808) 737-0890
www.unityhawaii.org

TO: Senate Committee on Economic Development and Taxation
FR: Mindy Tucker
President, Board of Trustees
Unity Church of Hawaii
RE: Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 5, 2008

Unity Church is the largest of the world's New Thought organized religions. We, as a spiritual movement, consider our teachings pan-denominational. We honor all the paths to God. A conference of this magnitude, and most importantly with this mission, can only help create harmony between all hearts, all religions, and all nations in the world. Hawaii would become a key player in promoting world peace. What better place to house this conference than where we have the presence of peoples practicing all the world's religions here in our island state.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 5.

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20 South Vineyard Blvd, Honolulu, HI 96813 808-779-3606

"Promoting the positive healing role of religion in public life by encouraging dialogue and community building".

Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
 Senator Will Espero, Vice Chair
 The Senate Committee on Economic Development and Taxation (EDT)
 State Capitol, Honolulu, HI 96813
 FAX 586-6659

May 18, 2008

Support for Senate Concurrent Resolution 5

Requesting The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism to establish A Statewide Interfaith Steering Committee, Conference Room 216, May 20, 2008, 1:15 p.m.


Aloha Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Will Espero and Members of the Committee:

The Interfaith Open Table strongly support this resolution. We are particularly pleased that the steering committee and the international conference will be inclusive and open to all religions. It will build upon the Council for a Parliament of World's Religions being held in Sydney, Australia in December of 2009.

Hawaii as the Aloha State is an ideal place to host such an event. Hawaii is an example of where diverse religions and races come together in harmony and promote open channels of communication. Perhaps we can be helpful in reducing much of the violence in the world.

For your information The Interfaith Open Table meets the First Wednesday of every month at 7 am. Our participants come from all churches and religions with an email list of nearly 300. Our usual format is sharing "our faith journey", respecting our diversity without taking political positions. We find that when people speak from the heart others can hear and resonate. We are also firm believers in the separation of church and state.

Your support of this resolution will be greatly appreciated.

Cordially,

 Rev. Sam Cox,
 Open Table Coordinator
SamCox@hawaii.rr.com