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GOVERNOR

Testimony of Linda L. Smith
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Before the

Senate Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Affordable Housing

Monday, February 11, 2008, 9:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 229

SB 2833 Relating to Sustainability

Chair Kokubun and Members of the Committee:

We appreciate the opportunity to voice concerns about SB 2833 that would establish a council and appropriate funds for implementing the 2050 Sustainability Plan.

Addressing and solving issues critical to Hawaii and the future of our way of life are at the core of Governor Lingle's initiative to transform our economy. That transformation cannot wait until 2050 and can only be accomplished if we concentrate our resources and efforts on specific projects with bold definable outcomes.

The provisions in this bill raise many questions. The Council is placed in the Office of the Auditor, an entity who has the specific statutory responsibility to perform financial and management audits. Yet the bill then moves the Council to the Office of Planning in July 2010. Why? Is it because this is near the end of Governor Lingle's second term? Is it because certain people want the Council to be outside the scrutiny and administrative controls of the executive branch?

The bill provides an unspecified sum for the Council and establishes an exempt position as the executive director. Already \$1.7 million has been spent on this project. Could this money have been better spent to create a wave action pilot project in Hawaii? Could this money have been used to purchase important agricultural lands currently up for sale? Could \$1.7 million help restore the Kakala o Kamoia sacred site in Kona, sustaining and preserving this historic locale for future generations to come? These are but three of numerous specific projects and programs that would immediately and concretely help address energy, self-sufficiency, and the cultural heritage of our state.

The Governor's Office raises these questions because we genuinely believe it is time for action – not councils or words. The world is evolving rapidly; a bolder vision is necessary. As Professor J. W. Huston noted a few years ago, sustainability is akin to treading water to stay in place. I believe none of us want to spend the rest of our lives treading water. We do want a better future for ourselves, our children, and those yet to be born.

How do we get there? The solutions are in front on us. Many have been proposed by the members of the Legislature on these committees. Enact legislation that provides Native Hawaiians, Kanaka Maoli, with \$200 million in assets to allow them to become masters of their own destiny. Enact legislation to set aside important agricultural lands that have been pending since our 1978 Constitution was changed. Enact a bill that allows quick, consolidated approval of renewable energy projects so that alternative power facilities are up and running without delays.

A recent People's Pulse poll concluded that for most of our citizens sustainability means being able to afford to stay in Hawaii. The Legislature also has the opportunity to address the high cost of living by enacting proposals for tax relief and tax refunds to working families.

In conclusion, we share the goal of solving the most fundamental issues that face our state in the 21st century, but we cannot wait to the middle of the century to get there and we need to use State, private, and non-profit resources to implement the many good ideas and immediate solutions that are right in front of us.