

SCR193

LATE

From: Chris Conybeare [conybeare@msn.com]
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To: JGO Testimony
Subject: *****SPAM***** SCR193/SR92 Hearing March 29

LATE

Testimony of Chris Conybeare in Support of SCR193/SR102
Before the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Government Operations
March 29, 2010

To: Sen. Brian Taniguchi Chair, Sen. Dwight Takamine, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee
Fr: Chris Conybeare

I am attending a meeting of the World Association of Press Councils (WAPC) in Northern Cyprus and am not able to appear in person, and others who are members of the Media Council Hawaii(MCH) are preparing testimony on behalf of MCH.

In the deliberations here I am constantly reminded of the struggles of people in places like Zimbabwe for a free and independent press. WAPC members, like MCH believe that an environment that promotes diversity of opinion and competition is necessary for an informed and engaged public. The fact that Hawaii has already lost important editorial diversity with the takeover of KGMB, KHNL, and KFVE by Raycom Media of Alabama, it is doubly important that all steps should be taken to help insure the viability of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin as an independent source of information.

To that end the public deserves complete transparency on the part of the ownership of both the Honolulu Star-Bulletin and The Honolulu Advertiser and adequate time must be given for potential purchasers of the Star-Bulletin to come forward. Otherwise, the merger of operations of these newspapers has serious anti-trust implications as well as the loss of an important editorial voice.

I am in support of the intent of the above captioned resolutions and urge your favorable action.

Aloha,
Chris Conybeare

THE SENATE

Committee on Judiciary and Government Operations
Senator Brian T. Taniguchi, Chair
Senator Dwight Y. Takamine, Vice Chair

State Capitol, Conference Room 016
Monday, March 29, 2010; 9:35 a.m.

**STATEMENT OF THE ILWU LOCAL 142 ON S.C.R. 193 AND S.R. 92
Urging the Owner of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin to Provide Sufficient Time
to Find a New Owner for the Newspaper to Preserve
Two Independent Daily Newspapers in the Community**

The ILWU Local 142 strongly supports S.C.R. 193 and S.R. 92, which urges the owner of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, who will now own the Honolulu Advertiser as well, to allow more time to find a suitable buyer for the Bulletin and allow two daily newspapers to co-exist in Hawaii.

In 1999, a similar scenario played itself out. Gannett, owner of the Honolulu Advertiser, and Rupert Phillips, owner of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, were parties to a joint operating agreement. When Phillips reached a deal with Gannett to close the Star-Bulletin in exchange for more than \$26 million, the community at that time was outraged. The "Save Our Star-Bulletin" coalition was formed to advocate for maintaining two independent editorial voices.

Along came David Black, then viewed as the savior of the Star-Bulletin. He bought the Bulletin and later MidWeek, a publication mailed weekly without charge to residents throughout Oahu. Black eventually changed the Star-Bulletin to a tabloid format, but remained competitive with the larger Advertiser, though not as profitable. Two editorial voices continued in Hawaii.

Then recently, Black, with financial support from Gannett, owner of the Advertiser, engineered a purchase of the Advertiser and put the Bulletin up for sale. He further declared that, if a qualified buyer was not found, he would merge both Bulletin and Advertiser operations. The end result would be that Hawaii would no longer have two independent daily newspapers and more than 900 jobs would be in jeopardy. Star-Bulletin workers have already received 60-day WARN notices.

Oahu Publications, which owns and operates the Star-Bulletin and MidWeek, have indicated that a viable buyer must surface before June of this year. That's not much time for a company to do the necessary due diligence to determine if buying the Bulletin is financially feasible. A few more months would allow a smoother transition for all concerned--even if the Bulletin is eventually merged with the Advertiser.

If the two papers are merged, many jobs will be lost. Hawaii's economy cannot afford another major layoff. If Oahu Publications can hold off a little longer, perhaps another knight in shining armor--like David Black himself was a decade ago--may surface for Hawaii to continue the benefit of two daily newspapers.

What concerns many people is the possibility that the purchase of the Advertiser and the potential

merger of the two papers may be a union-busting ploy. Under terms of the asset sale, all union contracts will be terminated and any employees who remain will be at-will--this for employees who for decades enjoyed strong union contracts that provided job protections.

We hope the Star-Bulletin will find a buyer and two independent editorial voices will continue. We hope that layoffs will be minimal and handled by attrition. And we hope the Advertiser and Star-Bulletin will remain unionized. These are our hopes--what happens in the end is up to others, but S.C.R. 193 and S.R. 92 offer an opportunity for the Legislature to express its sentiments about what is happening to Hawaii's two daily newspapers.

The ILWU urges adoption of S.C.R. 193 and S.R. 92. Thank you for the opportunity to share our views.

LATE

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TO: COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
Senator Brian T. Taniguchi, Chair
Senator Dwight Y. Takamine, Vice Chair
HEARING
DATE: Monday, March 29, 2010
TIME: 9:35 a.m.
PLACE: Conference Room 016
State Capitol

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SCR NO. 193 AND S.R. NO. 92 URGING THE OWNER OF THE HONOLULU STAR-BULLETIN TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT TIME TO FIND A NEW OWNER FOR THE NEWSPAPER TO PRESERVE TWO INDEPENDENT DAILY NEWSPAPERS IN THE COMMUNITY.

Chair Taniguchi, Chair Takamine, and Senator Bunda, Senator Gabbard, Senator Nishihara, and Senator Slom.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

I was shocked, as I'm sure you must have been, to note that the "For Sale" advertisement in the Star Bulletin announced that Oahu Publications started advertising on Monday, March 15, 2010 for the sale of the assets of the Star Bulletin and that interested persons were directed that they must submit a written or oral indication of interest to OPI within just 14 days -- no later than 5 p.m. HST, Monday, March 29, 2010 -- and must then submit an initial non-binding bid by 5:00 p.m., HST, Monday, April 5, seven days later.

This is hardly sufficient time, in my view, for those few ready, willing, and able newspaper buyers out there -- heaven knows where they may be -- to learn that the Star Bulletin is for sale, to garner enough information to develop an interest in buying it, and to put together a reasonable bid within the established deadline.

In consequence, I fear that the worst consequence, feared by many since many years ago even before Mr. Black purchased the Star Bulletin, that Honolulu would become a one newspaper town, will occur.

I was a member of S.O.S. (Save our Star Bulletin) back then. Our fear at that time was that without competition from another newspaper the Advertiser, the only remaining English language Honolulu Daily, would use its news monopoly to raise local advertising costs, to the detriment of customers whose cost of living was already about 30% higher than the mainland, and to reduce the news hole, thus omitting coverage of many important activities and reducing important but expensive investigative reporting. I do recall that just before Mr. Black announced that he would buy the Star-Bulletin, and if I recall correctly after the Star-Bulletin had stopped printing, the Advertiser had already begun to shrink into a thin replica of its former past.

It is not an answer to our similar concerns today that there are many other sources of news other than print newspapers, especially those on the internet, including blogs and the like, as well as television. We must keep clearly in mind that beyond the advantage of competition between newspapers are the traditions and codes of ethics that print news journalists have developed over many years and usually followed. Anyone who has been watching TV and listening to radio news, with the possible exception of PBS and Hawaii Public Radio, and reading most of the blogs, know that the quality and breadth of news produced, the objectivity, the accuracy, and the breadth of coverage, including especially that of local news, has deteriorated terribly. We have much to thank the author of Disappeared News, Larry Geller,

and Ian Lind, for, not to mention the limited efforts of Honolulu Weekly. Unfortunately, their coverage is necessarily limited. But without the regular provision and coverage of our two dailies there is no reason for confidence that the news information required in Hawaii for our democracy to flourish will continue to be available.

I therefore urge you to adopt these resolutions calling for the continued publication of the Star-Bulletin or, at the very least, "to provide sufficient time to find a qualified buyer for the newspaper in order to preserve publication of separate and independent daily newspapers in the community."

Mahalo nui loa for hearing my testimony. As I'm sure you are aware, the views I express here are my private views and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.H. or its law school.

Dick Miller