

Senator Baker- February 21st 2012:

I rise in support of SB 2012, our bipartisan Invest in Hawaii Act of 2012. This bill is important because it will match willing workers with desperately needed public works projects on all islands. With interest rates historically low, there is no better time than **now** for the State to make a significant investment in our aging infrastructure. The Department of Business Economic Development and Tourism projects that this measure alone could create or sustain more than 5K jobs – putting food on the table and restoring dignity to idle workers while getting shovel ready projects out the door. This bill will provide a streamlined procurement process to facilitate the start of construction, helping small businesses to compete and stimulating our economy.

According to DBEDT, public sector construction in 2010 comprised 34.8% of all construction contracts, but in 2011 public contracts dropped to less than half of the previous year or only 16.2% of all construction contracts. Let me speak a bit about my county of Maui. Over 50% of Maui's unionized carpenters are on the bench and yet this is plenty of work just no funding. SB 2012 provides that funding. Indeed, this measure provides much needed funds for infrastructure improvements for our schools, UHMaui College and all the UH system, DOH including our hospitals like Maui Memorial Medical Center and Kula, and DLNR projects. It's a win-win. Our government buildings need repair; our construction workers need and want jobs. Those paychecks will circulate in our community helping small business survive while decreasing

other types of government expenditures – transfer payments like unemployment compensation, food stamps and public assistance.

The R & M backlog in our schools is staggering. Every year I volunteer to be part of the school inspection teams for schools in the 5th Senatorial district. We find areas that need to be addressed and repaired. Then we meet with the school principals, complex CIP coordinator and DAGS Maui staff who manages R & M for DOE to see the amount of funds that have been allocated and how many of their priorities will be met or if the priorities need to be adjusted. That prioritization meeting didn't happen last fall as it should have. No new money was available for projects – the project requests already on the books and in the system are being pushed out several years. Even health and safety matters have to stand in line.

This bill with its \$500 million appropriation will go a long way to fixing that situation. It will help ensure that long overdue repairs are undertaken and student learning environments improved. Mr. President and colleagues, this measure will be a godsend for the schools in Maui County and around the state as well as for other critical infrastructure projects that have been languishing. Mahalo to Ways and Means for moving it expeditiously. I call on our House colleagues to do likewise and send it to the Governor's desk for early enactment. Mahalo.