

REPRESENTATIVE RICHARD ONISHI

2017 End of Session Newsletter

May 2017

Session Recap

I would first like to thank everyone who called, emailed, and/or visited me during the legislative session to express their concerns and support. I am very grateful for your confidence and trust in me to represent you in the House of Representatives. In response to the many calls, letters, and emails, received from the constituency in the district I have taken the following actions to address your expressed concerns and needs.

As Chair for the Committee on Tourism, I was tasked with focusing on legislation relating to the state's visitor industry. I introduced a package of bills (**HB1310 & HB1469**) to revitalize the dilapidated Banyan Drive area and make significant changes to provisions in the leasing of public lands by individuals, businesses, non-profits, schools and government entities. The Senate combined both bills into one (**HB1469**) during their review of the bills. Unfortunately, the Senate killed the bill at the very end of this year's session, which resulted in the State not providing any mechanism for the planning and development of Banyan Drive this session. I will continue to pursue the State's support to help revitalize our Banyan Drive area.

Another important issue for the State is the increasing number of unpermitted short-term vacation rentals which have become a problem in some residential neighborhoods throughout the State, as well as concerns that they were not paying millions of dollars in General Excise Taxes (GET) and Transient Accommodations Taxes (TAT). I introduced differing approaches (**HB1470 & HB1471**) to the collection of these taxes and addressing the unpermitted uses. **HB1470** did not survive the House Judiciary Committee and **HB1471** made it to Conference Committee but at the end of the day all of the stakeholders could not agree, so the bill died in Conference.

As the former Vice Chair of Agriculture, I introduced a few bills to help with funding for a couple of agriculturally related programs. I reintroduced the appropriations bill (**HB481**) to provide funds for Little Fire Ant pesticide coupon program on Hawaii Island. The coupons would provide homeowners and businesses funds to cover most of the cost for a year's supply of pesticides to treat for Little Fire Ants. The bill passed the House but was not given a hearing in the Senate's final committee, the Ways & Means Committee. **HB480** dealt with providing a full-time staff person and funds for equipment & supplies for the agricultural program at Hawaii Community College. Different versions of **HB480** passed out of both the House and Senate. The Senate took out the funding for the position, the equipment and supplies, and replaced it with a study. The Conference Committee could not reach agreement on the final version.



Rep with Kamehameha Schools



Shaking in hands with the winner



Rep. with the Kick Butts students



Rep. and Augie T



Rep. with staff Isaac and Derek



UH Hilo Luncheon

4 Mile Creek Bridge:

Those of us who commute between Hilo and the Pana`ewa stretch have probably traveled over the 4 Mile Creek bridge located at the south end of Kilauea Avenue near its intersection with Haihai Street. The bridge serves a large volume of traffic on a daily basis, and those of us who have driven this route know just how congested the area can be especially during the peak morning and afternoon hours. The single-lane bridge bottlenecks the flow of traffic on one of only two roads for commuting between Hilo and the Pana`ewa stretch.

A 2015 bridge inspection report found the bridge to have an aging and deteriorating structure, and those of us who have traveled across the bridge may have observed its old and deteriorating condition. Reports of vehicle accidents at this bridge and adjacent intersection have been consistent over the years and rising with the increase in traffic through the area. Accordingly, there has been increased community concerns about the ability to safely traverse the bridge and nearby intersection.

This year the legislature approved my request of \$13 million in capital improvement project funding to cover the cost of replacing the single-lane bridge with a two-lane bridge and to do nearby intersection improvements to alleviate the traffic congestion and improve the safety of the area.



Photo courtesy of: Hawaii Tribune Herald

Pana`ewa Stretch Improvements (Hwy 11):

Besides the \$13 million in funding for the 4-mile bridge, \$2 million in funds were also secured for motor vehicle deceleration and acceleration lanes to increase the traffic safety to the Pana`ewa stretch (Hwy 11), at the Mamaki and Lama Street intersections. These safety lanes will provide for motor vehicles to safely leave and join the flow of traffic on the highway.

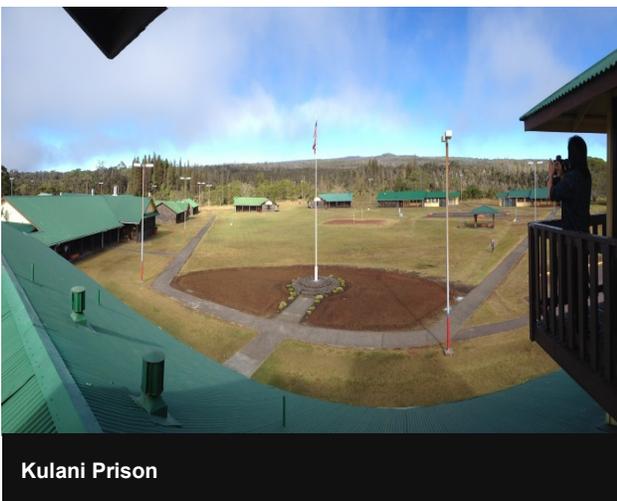
House Bill 478

Relating to Public Safety; Kulani Correctional Facility Agriculture Operation; Appropriation (\$)

Appropriates funds for a full-time agricultural management position and equipment for the Kulani correctional facility agriculture operation and a full-time agricultural management position for the Waiawa correctional facility agriculture operation.

This bill provides funding for a full-time temporary agricultural management position (\$50,000) and for equipment (\$50,000) for the Kulani Correctional and Waiawa Correctional facilities' agricultural programs. These programs provide inmates a unique environment where they learn a variety of technical skills and trades in horticulture, including the care and identifying of plants, managing and controlling pests, applying planting and harvesting techniques, and the operation, maintenance and repair of farm equipment. Other benefits that are associated with the development of the inmates in these programs are that they tend to be less aggressive, less prone to recidivism, are healthier, and tend to consume a higher-quality diet. Farm inmates are also exposed to a functioning workplace and gain benefits such as employability, time management and responsibility skills, access to nature, individual and team building skills, and conflict resolution.

The funding that will be provided to the Kulani Correctional Facility allows for the development of an agricultural operation on that site which takes advantage of the area's unique location and characteristics. This program will hopefully be able to connect these inmates to the land and produce a group of future farmers who will now have options for a better life as they re-enter society.



Kulani Prison



Reps touring prison grounds.



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Mahalo from my family to yours.....