



*Aloha e Friends,*

I hope you and your 'ohana are well and had a wonderful Thanksgiving weekend. Hard to believe Christmas is just around the corner, and that our next legislative session begins January 17. If you have any ideas on bills you'd like introduced, let me know. It doesn't have to be fully fleshed out, just an idea is fine. We can send it to our Senate attorneys, and they'll put it in the correct language. Then I'll send it back to you for your input. It's important to me that constituents get involved in the actual process, so it's not just 76 legislators saying, *ok, what are we gonna do this year?* I really appreciate public input into the law-making process, and now's the time to do it before session starts. It's exciting to watch a bill as it travels through the legislative process and becomes

law. As always, please contact me at (808) 586-6830 or [sengabbard@capitol.hawaii.gov](mailto:sengabbard@capitol.hawaii.gov) if I can help you or your 'ohana in any way. I also invite you to follow me on social media: [Instagram](#) @SenatorMikeGabbard, [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), and [Twitter](#) @SENMIKEGABBARD. Also, if you'd like to be added to my mailing list, you can send an email to [sengabbard@capitol.hawaii.gov](mailto:sengabbard@capitol.hawaii.gov) with "mailing list" in the subject line. Best wishes to you and your 'ohana. Me ke aloha pumehana,

## DISTRICT 21 COMMUNITY UPDATES

**COMMITTEE CHAIR**

**AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT**

**MEMBER**

- ◆ Judiciary
- ◆ Government Operations

**DISTRICT 21**

Portion of Fernandez Village, a portion of Ewa, Kapolei, Makakilo, and Kalaeloa

### Listen Story Community Meeting

Please join me at my next Listen Story Community meeting on Saturday, January 27, from 9am-10am, at either Kapolei High School or Ho'okele Elementary. I'll let you know... We'll have a Guest Speaker followed by District 21 Community Updates. There'll be time for Q & A. You'll also have the option to attend virtually. Please email or call my office for a link to the zoom meeting. ICYMI, we welcomed Craig Nakamoto, HCDA's Executive Director, as our guest speaker at my Listen Story Community meeting at Kapolei High School Teachers Lounge on Nov. 4, 2023. An attorney by training, Craig has served in various legal and business capacities for companies in



Hawai'i over the last forty years. He served as the community outreach officer for the Hawai'i Community Development Authority (HCDA) in 2008-2009 and then returned to this position in 2021. In May 2022, he was appointed as the HCDA's Executive Director. What does the HCDA do? [View his presentation to find out.](#) Followed by brief community updates. You can watch

the video recording [here](#) and view past recordings of Listen Story meetings on my YouTube channel [here](#).



### IPA Hispanic Heritage Festival

On September 23, I was keynote speaker at Island Pacific Academy for their premier annual National Hispanic Heritage festival. The event celebrates the cultural heritage of Latin American countries, including Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America. Muchas gracias to Laura Guzman, IPA's Secondary Spanish Teacher and International Cultural & Educational Exchange Program Coordinator for planning the event and inviting me to speak.

# COMMUNITY UPDATES

## Ho'opili's Urban Garden Learning Fair

The 2nd annual Ho'opili Urban Garden Learning Fair, sponsored by D.R. Horton Hawai'i, was held November 18, at the master planned community in West O'ahu. The event brought together gardening enthusiasts, experts, and community leaders, and members to celebrate the importance of urban gardening and food sustainability education.

We all know that gardening is beneficial to our health. It promotes natural movement, healthier eating, and helps people to live more sustainably—not to mention, helps people to become more self-sufficient. D.R. Horton Hawai'i, showcased their urban garden initiatives at Ho'opili, offering attendees a glimpse into the benefits of edible gardens. The fair provided a platform for residents and the public to learn about gardening opportunities within the community and gain insights from urban garden and agriculture experts. Having events like Ho'opili's Urban Garden Learning Fair makes it easy for people to gather where they live to learn these skills.



Pictured with Mike Moefu and Winnie Marcos, of Aloun Farms.

We import 85-90% of our food at a cost of about \$3 billion annually. Yet, we have hundreds of thousands of unused acres of available ag land and the best growing season in the country! Instead of complaining about the problem, Ho'opili is taking action and being part of the solution... They're setting an example for the rest of the state to follow.

I'm told there are over 2,600 families living in Ho'opili since the first family moved in July 2017; and I'm just imagining the benefits if each family, plus future families, planted edibles in their garden. Mahalo to Tracy Tonaki, D.R. Horton Division President, for hosting the Learning Fair. Not only is Ho'opili encouraging folks to grow home gardens, but they're helping to educate them on how to do it in an urban setting by bringing in local experts. Mahalo nui to Hawaii Tropical Fruit Growers, Aloun Farms, Mari's Gardens, Fred Lau Hawaiian Landscape Co., Hawaiian Earth Products, The Urban Farmers Store, and UH College of Tropical Agriculture & Human Resources (CTAHR) for sharing their expertise and helping Ho'opili residents become more self-sufficient.

I really enjoyed attending the event and talking with the residents and local experts. I look forward to seeing what the future of Ho'opili brings.



Pictured with Tracy Tracy Tonaki, D.R. Horton Division President.

# AEN UPDATES

## Sugarland Growers Farm Site Visit



Sugarland Growers in Kunia on Nov. 16, 2023.

On November 16, my staff and I were invited on a site tour of Larry Jeffs' Sugarland Growers in Kunia. Larry operates a family-run business with farms on O'ahu and Moloka'i. They've been farming in Hawai'i for more than 30 years. With over 14,000 acres, Sugarland Growers is Hawai'i's largest local farm. Some of these farms are located within the areas of West Loch, Barbers Point, and West O'ahu. Established in 1995, the company has an annual revenue of \$10-20 million and employs a staff of approximately 240. Sugarland Growers produces about 1 million pounds of fruits and vegetables every seven days for local families and outlets. I really enjoyed visiting and talking story with Larry. My Agriculture & Environment (AEN) Committee Vice Chair, Sen. Tim Richards, who's a rancher on the Big Island, joined the tour as well. We all piled into a van as Larry showed us around the grounds and impressed us with all his stories.



Sugarland Growers with Larry Jeffs and Sen. Tim Richards.

The Jeffs's farm began in Moloka'i, featuring cucumbers, tomatoes, watermelons, and other crops. With the farm's success, business was able to expand beyond Moloka'i and on to the old O'ahu sugar cane and pineapple farm lands, and become what is known today as Sugarland Growers, Inc. The company is now one of Hawai'i's largest diversified crop operations. At Sugarland Growers, crops are



At tomato sorting facility at Sugarland Growers

grown to exclusively suit the needs of Hawai'i's customers. This is especially important because of the diverse populations found on the islands and the varied diets the cultures require. These commodities include apple bananas, broccoli, green bell peppers, cabbages, Chinese cabbages, cucumbers, several varieties of tomatoes, and several varieties of watermelons.

It's crucial to the company to keep their product as fresh as possible and to also ensure maximum sustainability is achieved. The produce is not usually shipped out of state; thus keeping costs down by reducing overhead and freight charges, reducing the company's carbon footprint, and reducing costs for the most important assets—the customers. Their products can be found locally at operations such as: Big-box clubs, commissaries, farmers markets, major supermarkets, neighborhood stores, and military retail stores. Sugarland Growers is affiliated with: Hawai'i Agriculture Research Center, Hawai'i Department of Agriculture, Hawai'i Farm Bureau Federation, Hikiola Cooperative, Kunia Water Cooperative, National Research Conservation Service, and West O'ahu Soil and Water Conservation District Program. The owners of Sugarland come from generations of farmers and foragers, dating back all the way to the time of the Pilgrims. Today, Sugarland employs workers on O'ahu and Moloka'i.

Even though I visited Larry's farm in 2016, it felt like a whole new tour. He'd even updated his tomato sorting facility. Mahalo to Larry for inviting me.

# AEN UPDATES

## Red Hill Informational Briefing

I've been a member of the Red Hill Fuel Tank Advisory Committee (FTAC) since 2014. The Committee was formed by the Hawai'i State Legislature in response to a fuel release in January 2014 of approximately 27,000 gallons of jet fuel at the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility. The backstory is that twenty tanks were built into a mountainside near Pearl Harbor to store fuel during World War II, and the facility sits just 100 ft. above O'ahu's primary drinking water aquifer. The release occurred following routine maintenance and repair work during the course of refilling Red Hill Storage Tank #5. The Navy reported the release to the Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH), which led to a task force being created to investigate what happened to cause the release and what the Navy intended to do to prevent it from ever happening again. After an arduous process, sparked by public outrage at every step, a long and tumultuous eight-year journey ensued. Sadly, it took disastrous consequences and a catastrophe so nightmarish, the Navy has been forced to concede responsibility and admit the absolute necessity of defueling the tanks.

On November 2, I held a joint informational briefing on the status of the [Red Hill Defueling](#). The briefing was co-chaired by the Senate Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee and my Senate Agriculture & Environment (AEN) Committee. The purpose was for the Joint Task Force-Red Hill to update the public and committee members on the defueling of Red Hill. The HHS Committee is made up of: Sen. Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair, Sen. Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair,



and Sens. Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Maile S.L. Shimabukuro, and Brenton Awa. The AEN Committee is made up of myself as Chair, Sen. Tim Richards III, Vice Chair, and Sens. Lynn DeCoite, Karl Rhoads and Brenton Awa. We heard from the Navy Region Hawai'i /Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Hawai'i (NAVFAC), and DOH officials. I felt that Vice Adm. John Wade, commander, Joint Task Force-Red Hill, sincerely engaged with committee members and did his best to answer our questions. You can view the entire briefing on the Senate YouTube channel [here...](#) and read more here: [As Red Hill defueling progresses, military briefs Hawaii lawmakers on plans and commitments | Honolulu Star-Advertiser \(staradvertiser.com\)](#).

"While most members of the Joint Task Force-Red Hill (JTF-RH) charged with defueling were not responsible for past years of Navy neglect at the facility, they will have to deal with today's deep-seated, justifiable distrust of the military." (9.23.23 Star Advertiser)

As the parent of a daughter who has served in the Hawai'i Army National Guard (HIANG), and continues to serve in the Army Reserves today, I believe everyone statewide appreciates and is grateful to all our service members for their service to our country. Still, I agree with the quote from the editorial that "today there is a deep-seated justifiable distrust of the military." I'm hopeful that moving forward an unwavering trust between Hawai'i residents and the military will be restored. And that essentially depends on what steps the military takes to restore that trust.

As a resident of O'ahu and the Chair of the AEN Committee, I'm relieved that the defueling of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility is finally happening. As of November 17, an estimated 103,458,180 of the 104 million gallons stored in the 80-year-old massive underground fuel tanks at Red Hill in Pearl Harbor have been removed.

