

CITY COUNCILS HELD HOSTAGE BY LEGISLATURE'S INACTION

The most frustrating part of being a member of Honolulu's City Council is waiting for the State Legislature to get serious about our transportation crisis, hospital closures, and skyrocketing utility bills.

Regarding the transportation crisis, the Honolulu City Council passed resolution 11-308 CD1 unanimously on January 25 to send the state legislature a message that transportation relief does not always have to be about roadway construction or tax increases.

The resolution urges the legislature to allow what many other states already have, and that is the authority to mandate insurance providers notify the Department of Motor Vehicle Registration when a policyholder cancels insurance coverage. In this way, a police officer can access data on their computer without having to pull over a driver to find out if the vehicle is in non-compliance and rather, know if the license plate entered is without insurance coverage right on the spot.

After implementing this data sharing system, the state of Georgia took a twenty-two percent population of uninsured motorists off of their roads almost over night down to just two-percent with a few thousand dollars in software. The counties in our state cannot implement this system without the legislature providing the enabling legislation in statute.

So if you want to get instant traffic relief, then get behind HB1351, a bill I helped write while still working at the legislature that will give our police force an added tool to remove the uninsured motorists from our roads.

When it comes to the health care crisis, it amazes me how something as simple as keeping a hospital afloat has eluded our governor and legislators.

I introduced resolution 12-14 that urges the legislature apply the same type of fiscal responsibility undertaken to save two hospitals from closing- one on Maui and another in Kahuku, and duplicate that policy to save the hospital in West Oahu.

Another solution is for the state to float bonds similar to what the city has planned to fund the rail. The owner of the hospital can pay the bonds back over time so the taxpayer is not stuck with the bill for bailing them out.

When it comes to our dilapidated water and sewer facilities, the legislature has the attitude that we can just flush our way out somehow and cope with skyrocketing rates to fix it. Not so.

The counties have no authority to tax outside of property taxes. The legislature should allow the counties to explore tax options that are voluntary such as gaming. Legalize a harmless game of BINGO if nothing else so we can raise some cash and infuse it into our infrastructure.

Another idea is to squeeze more pennies out of the tourists that land here by boat or plane from out of state and let the people decide, county by county, if that is the way to go to counter water and sewer rate increases for residents.

One option to combat these massive residential sewer rate increases upon us is to shift water rates to the hotel visitor industry. Residents could find some relief in knowing hotel users would be paying their fair share. However, the legislature does not let the counties tax and carve out a revenue source on the visitor industry alone.

Residents need more options to consider from their elected officials to address higher utility bills and it is time to think out of the box. For when we cut back on water usage, our bill still goes up. The less water we use, the more government needs to charge us to make up for our own attempts to save...they need our money, no matter what we do to fight it. This is truly, a broken system.

Another option to rescue Honolulu from over taxation is for the legislature to repeal the rail surcharge and let the private sector instead build traffic relief measures using managed lanes for buses that need no new taxes to build, operate, and maintain. Our construction workers would attain jobs faster too with highway technology better than they would with rail. The federal government has \$15 billion available in tax exempt bonds for Honolulu to build managed lanes- but the state legislature has to enact a law first to allow managed lanes in our counties that use State right-of-ways.

In conclusion, the legislature needs to lessen its grip on the counties and give the counties more leeway to resolve its own problems. And if the share of the Transient Accommodations Tax is taken away from the counties by the state, Honolulu alone will lose out on some \$90 million a year and the shell game of who pays to make up the difference will be fierce.

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