



Lawmakers make priorities for 2008

Health care, education, agriculture top list

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HONOLULU -- Health care, agricultural sustainability and education top the list of priorities for Big Island lawmakers as they head into the 2008 regular legislative session.

But like those statewide, Hawaii Island projects could fall victim to a tight budget year, or become the rope in a tug-of-war between Republican Gov. Linda Lingle, who wants up to \$40 million in tax cuts, and Democratic legislators, who seek to shore up the economy by providing needed services.

The Council on Revenues -- a group of economists who meet periodically to determine how much money is available for government to spend -- last week reduced its estimate of revenue growth for this year from 5.7 percent to 4.9 percent.

At the same time, it slightly increased next year's growth from 3.8 percent to 4.1 percent. Each percentage point equals about \$45 million in general revenues, the primary source of money for the state's operating budget.

The session starts Wednesday and continues until May 1. Lawmakers will meet for 60 days in floor sessions and spend the remainder of the time working in committees, meeting constituents and fielding lobbyists before most of them head home to the campaign trail.

Lawmakers will be eager to finish the session, and most will be pushing extra hard to bring the bacon back to their districts to help grease the skids of their campaign sleds.

"Had we addressed the health issues and reforms the first year of the biennium, we'd be ahead," said Sen. Lorraine Inouye, D-Hamakua, South Hilo. "Because we didn't do much with reform, now we're stuck with a crisis."

Almost all of the island's 10 lawmakers list some kind of health issue among their top three priorities.

Rep. Josh Green, D-North Kona, Keauhou, Kailua-Kona, the Legislature's only physician and chairman of the House Health Committee, is proposing a Rural Health Act -- a package that includes health enterprise zones, increased reimbursement rates, lawsuit reform and a Hawaii Health Corps to lure doctors.

More incremental steps are being forwarded by Rep. Bob Herkes, D-Ka'u, South Kona, who wants a mobile medical van based at Kona Community Hospital to provide clinical services to rural communities, and Rep. Faye Hanohano, D-Puna, Pahoa, Hawaiian Acres, who's seeking a comprehensive health center for the Makuu Hawaiian Home Lands project in Puna.

Both House and Senate members also are pushing to protect the Big Island's agricultural resources, by protecting ag lands from development pressure and seeking sustainability through agriculture and alternative energy. Sen. Russell Kokubun, D-South Hilo, Puna, Ka'u, wants to create a sustainability council and elevate the Office of Planning back to its former prominence as a full department.

"We need to recognize we need long-range planning for Hawaii's future," Kokubun said. "It's getting so expensive our children find it difficult to envision Hawaii as their home."

Rep. Clift Tsuji, D-South Hilo, Puna, Keaau, chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, believes invasive species control has to be part of the mix. He's proposing funds to support the Department of Agriculture's invasive species strategic plan and a joint state-federal bio security facility near Honolulu International Airport.

"Slow piecemeal legislation is not effective and usually reactionary," Tsuji said. "All these invasive species are the single greatest threat to our economy and the lifestyle we enjoy as Hawaii's people."

Education issues remain on the front burner as well. They include capital requests, such as a new gym for Hilo High School and new regional library for Keaau and earmarking general revenues for University of Hawaii facilities repair and maintenance.

Increasing the number of charter schools in rural areas is another of Herke's priorities. Ocean View, for example, has two elementary schools 40 miles apart.

"Kindergartners should not be forced to take a 20-mile bus ride," Herkes said.

Rep. Jerry Chang, D-South Hilo, will be focusing on university issues in his role of chairman of the House Higher

Education Committee. He thinks Aloha Stadium could be better managed to make money, and he's offering legislation to do just that.

"There's a lot of potential revenue that's not being tapped right now for Aloha Stadium," Chang said.

More info

2008 Legislative Session

- Jan. 16: Opening day of session
- Jan. 22: Governor's State-of-the-State address
- May 1: Adjournment
- For more information and copies of bills, <http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov>

More info

Big Island lawmakers' top 3 priorities for 2008

- **Sen. Lorraine Inouye, D-Hamakua, South Hilo**-1) Health care issues, including reimbursement rates and Kona Community Hospital-2) New gym for Hilo High School to also be used as emergency shelter-3) Tax holidays -- no general excise tax for a back-to-school shopping weekend
- **Sen. Russell Kokubun, D-South Hilo, Puna, Ka'u**-1) Regional library for Keaau, for use by Upper and Lower Puna-2) Create a Department of Planning and Sustainability to implement 2050 Plan-3) Affordable housing -- rentals, transitional and self-help housing, such as the Kaloko Housing Program
- **Rep. Jerry Chang, D-South Hilo**-1) Earmark 1 percent of general revenues for University of Hawaii facilities repair and maintenance-2) Replace Aloha Stadium Authority with a new Aloha Corp. to generate income for UH athletics-3) Capital projects for UH-Hilo: Hawaiian language building, pharmacy building, Mahouli-Kapiolani extension
- **Rep. Cindy Evans, D-North Kona, South Kohala**-1) Wildfire protection for susceptible communities such as Waikoloa-2) Health care issues, including physician retention and recruitment-3) Capital improvement funding for the fast-growing district, particularly for schools
- **Rep. Josh Green, D-North Kona, Keauhou, Kailua-Kona**-1) Infrastructure for Kona -- roads, hospital, schools-2) Rural Health Act -- Hawaii Health Corps, health enterprise zones, reimbursement and tort reform-3) Restore civility in dialogue between Republicans and Democrats, Oahu and neighbor islands, etc.
- **Rep. Faye Hanohano, D-Puna, Pahoa, Hawaiian Acres**-1) Comprehensive health center for Makuu Hawaiian Home Lands project in Puna-2) Identify and clean up depleted uranium at Pohakuloa Training Area-3) Make taro the official state plant
- **Rep. Bob Herkes, D-Ka'u, South Kona**-1) Mobile medical van based at Kona hospital to provide clinical services to rural communities-2) More charter schools for rural and underserved areas such as Ka'u-3) Fully stock disaster shelters with communications, emergency food and water
- **Rep. Dwight Takamine, D-Kohala, Hamakua, North Hilo**-1) Economic health and workforce development through enhanced educational opportunities-2) Sustainability by investing in agriculture and alternative energy-3) One-stop centers coordinating services for kupuna and their families
- **Rep. Clift Tsuji, D-South Hilo, Puna, Keaau**-1) Protect agricultural lands by recognizing their importance to sustainability-2) Strategic plan for invasive species control, fund a state-federal biosecurity facility at Honolulu International Airport and harbor-3) Legislation to prohibit intrastate sale of plants on restricted list, such as miconia and tree daisy