

Tropical Gardening: Winter storms can wreak havoc on homes and gardens

February 3, 2024 | West Hawaii Today (Kailua-Kona, HI)

Author: Norman Bezona Special to West Hawaii Today 840 Words

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We often find ourselves worried about storm damage as hurricane season approaches in June. Hurricanes can cause tremendous damage on the rare occasion that one comes our way, but they are few and far between. The facts show that on an annual basis, we have more cumulative damage due to high winds and rains from storms from February through March. This means now is the time to do the pruning required to keep our trees healthy.

What we have learned from storms when a cold front comes from the Gulf of Alaska with high winds, is that the major damage done from actual winds was to trees like lychee, macadamia, mahogany and other broadleaved trees. However, palms like Coconut, Royal, Cabbage Palms, Mexican Fan Palms, Pritchardia and scores of others survive the storm winds. Many will tolerate flooding with little damage as well.

If the soil was so soggy that the palms tipped over, they were easy to replant and recover. Since there are hundreds of species, the question is - which palms can be used to create your tropical landscape with a minimum of storm damage and care? The Hawaii Island Palm Society is available to help folks answer that question so check out their website. The UH College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources master gardeners help line can also be of service. In East Hawaii, call 808-981-5199. In West Hawaii, the number is 808-322-4893.

When it comes to trees other than palms, remember they are important elements of parks, streets and home gardens. Do not forget that they supply oxygen, sequester carbon and in general are helping to minimize the negative effects of global climate change. However, they do require proper maintenance to ensure they make it through stormy weather. It is always important to inspect your trees for dead branches that seem to be ready to fall. A gust of wind can snap an arm-size branch from a tree and send it at missile speed through a picture window.

A low hanging branch over a roof can wreak havoc. Powerful winds can turn the limb into a tool of destruction. This tool can remove shingles as easily as a fish can remove scales. Removing dead and out of place limbs is a good idea even if there is no storm.

Fan-like fungus growing on the side of a tree trunk indicates rotten spots that need attention. A hole made by poor pruning, damage from earlier storms, or the gouge of an auto bumper can start rotten spots.

Remove decayed trees that are too weak to hold up under the strain of a storm. This action will save you grief later.

Actually, even a 60-mile-an-hour wind is not as dangerous as it sounds if necessary measures are taken before the wind reaches gale force.

If your home is located in an area that might be flooded, you'll be given ample notice to evacuate hours before the storm reaches your area. Otherwise, there is no safer place than in a well built home.

Once the storm has passed it is a good idea to inspect the trees and other plants around the house. Usually all the plants will show signs of wind damage. With a little trimming, propping, resettling of root systems, fertilizing and watering, nearly all plants that were shaken loose from the ground can be salvaged. After March, it is a good idea to consider root pruning as a way to manage those larger trees. If in doubt on what to do, you may contact a local certified arborist to assess the situation and correct it.

Many of our tropical trees grow rampant with extensive root systems. That is why we prune to keep them from getting out of hand, but let us prune the right way. Late spring and summer are not the best time for heavy pruning since shade is at a premium during those hot days ahead. February is a good time as the days are getting longer

but the sun's rays are less intense than after March when spring and summer are upon us.

In conclusion, remember that trees are vital to making urban life healthier for us physically, mentally and even spiritually. Forest fires, storms and drought are destroying our forests on a global scale. On the other hand, every time we plant a tree, we help to minimize the effects of global warming.

Enjoy those beautiful trees in your garden by maintaining them correctly. On a grander scale, work with Hawaii County and State governments to plant more trees in parks, roads and highways. We depend on the tourist industry. Visitors to our islands as well as residents appreciate our beautiful landscapes. Without trees, this would just be another barren desert island. Palms, because of their beauty and tenacity make a great choice.

Norman Bezona is professor emeritus, University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**

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Hawaiian Electric program aims to 'defend against the increasing threat of wildfires'

February 2, 2024 | Hawaii Tribune-Herald (Hilo, HI)

Author: JOHN BURNETT Hawaii Tribune-Herald | 801 Words

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Hawaiian Electric Co. said Thursday the state Public Utilities Commission approved its \$190 million Climate Adaptation Transmission and Distribution Resilience Program application.

According to a statement by the power utility, the program "will help defend against the increasing threat of wildfires and harden its five island electric grids against severe weather-related events fueled by climate change."

HECO said a \$95 million grant under the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will be matched with \$95 million to come from ratepayers.

The estimated cost increase on a typical monthly bill for a residential customer using 500 kilowatt hours will be 47 cents on Hawaii Island, 39 cents in Maui County and 17 cents on Oahu, HECO said.

"As climate change progresses, the frequency and severity of severe weather events is likely to increase," the PUC stated in its decision. "Given the critical services that rely on electric service to function and our state's geographic isolation, it is imperative that our electric grid be able to withstand these growing challenges."

Part of the five-year plan by HECO is to strengthen or replace 2,100 poles on critical circuits statewide.

Investing in a more resilient power system will address the increasing threat of wildfires, reduce the severity of damage when major events happen, and enable service to be restored more quickly, according to HECO.

The utility also plans to move some critical circuits underground and to remove trees deemed hazardous in critical areas.

Michael Konowicz, a private online meteorologist and board member of the Waikoloa Village Association, called the move "a step in the right direction."

"There hasn't been an increase in severe weather events, so I question that stat," he said. "But I do like the intent to make sure that we are resilient as possible, regardless of whatever Mother Nature throws our way."

"The utilities really do need to step up and harden the grid to protect us from the fires they create. On the Aug. 8 fires on the Big Island, in the community meetings I've been to, (the Hawaii Fire Department) said they believed HECO lines were responsible for several of those fires on my side of the island."

Wildfires on Maui that day devastated Lahaina and claimed the lives of 100 people.

HFD Chief Kazuo Todd said in September there were seven fires in West Hawaii that same day, with 80-mph-plus winds hampering firefighting efforts. Todd said one large warehouse in the Mauna Kea Beach area was destroyed and "about seven" other structures - none of them residential - sustained damage.

No deaths or injuries were reported on the Big Island.

The awarding of the \$95 million federal grant was first announced by President Joe Biden during a visit to Maui soon after the deadly wildfires.

"We appreciate the PUC's approval of our plan, and we thank the U.S. Department of Energy and the Biden

administration for their funding support as we work with partners across the state to help Maui recover, to reduce the risk of wildfires and to make our system stronger," said Colton Ching, HECO senior vice president of planning and technology.

In a separate statement Thursday, HECO urged customers to prepare for heavy rains and winds that could impact Hawaii Island, Oahu and Maui County today and Saturday.

"We take the threat of severe weather seriously, and we want to reassure our customers that we're ready to respond," said HECO spokesman Darren Pai. "We ask that they check their preparations at their homes and businesses in case they experience any outages or other emergencies."

The National Weather Service on Thursday forecast "showers likely and breezy" for today and tonight, and "scattered showers and breezy for tomorrow." However, as of mid-afternoon Thursday, the NWS website noted "no watches, warnings, or advisories at this time."

Konowicz said a "weak cold front" is coming through, and there will be rain and wind, but didn't echo the tone of HECO's press release.

"As a meteorologist, I see the weather being used as a scapegoat for a lot of issues and problems," he said. "And HECO should be providing a hardened grid with reliable service, regardless of any weather."

"The weather should never be to blame for their difficulties. They need to build a grid and provide service in a way where weather isn't an issue."

Konowicz said a greater concern was HECO's rolling blackouts on the Big Island Tuesday and Wednesday.

"In 2024, there should never be a rolling blackout with all the technology that we have at our disposal," he said. "... What happened ... was troubling in that they had two generating systems offline, and too much cloud cover to generate decent power through their solar farms. And then, there were no winds."

"The stability of getting electricity everywhere is super vulnerable. So as much as I'm concerned about wildfire mitigation, I'm concerned that homes and businesses have reliable, dependable power - regardless of the weather."

Email John Burnett at jburnett@hawaiiitribune-herald.com.

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Electric grid plan approved: Hawaiian Electric program aims to 'defend against the increasing threat of wildfires'

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Author: JOHN BURNETT Hawaii Tribune-Herald | Section: NewsNews | 802 Words

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Measures seek to ease Puna's insurance crisis

January 31, 2024 | Garden Island, The (Lihue, HI)

Section: Hawaii News | 797 Words

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PUNA, Hawai'i — A raft of bills in the state Legislature aim to stave off an insurance crisis in lower Puna.

Ten bills, spearheaded by Puna Rep. Greggor Ilagan, propose a wide variety of solutions to a problem that reared its head last year when Universal Property and Casualty Insurance Co. of Florida announced that it would withdraw from the state insurance market by the end of August of this year, leaving its roughly 1,000 policyholders in the state — most of whom are on the Big Island — in a difficult position.

With Universal, one of the last providers offering coverage in lower Puna, abandoning ship, most homeowners will be left with only one insurance option: the state-run provider of last resort, Hawaii Property Insurance Association, whose yearly rates for basic coverage have ballooned to thousands of dollars.

In an effort to forestall this crisis, Ilagan's bills — House Bills 2047 through 2056 — offer solutions ranging between minor changes to the management of HPIA to sweeping laws governing how insurance providers can operate in Hawaii.

"We had a lot of ideas, but we've landed on these 10," Ilagan said. "I know the insurers might not like some of them, but this is hitting my constituents hard."

Arguably the most substantial of the bills is HB 2047, which would establish a state-run "lava zone insurance fund" that would help subsidize insurance premiums for certain residents in Lava Zones 1 and 2. While the current version of the bill does not specify how much money would be allocated to this fund, beneficiaries would be limited to low-income households.

Ilagan said the fund, if established, would award to eligible households insurance vouchers of an indeterminate value: "It could be \$200 or it could be more like \$1,000."

Other bills would directly address insurance providers and how they operate. HB 2053 would establish a cap on premiums for properties located in Lava Zones 1 and 2 using comparable Big Island properties outside of those zones, while HB 2052 would simply prohibit insurers from refusing to issue coverage to an applicant just because that applicant lives in a lava zone.

Another bill, HB 2055, would establish a two-year moratorium on all mortgage foreclosures within Lava Zones 1 and 2.

"The state can set rules for how providers can do business in Hawaii," Ilagan said, although he noted that, unless handled deftly, measures like this could simply scare providers out of the state entirely.

Five of the remaining bills — HB 2048, 2049, 2050, 2051 and 2054 — would make changes to HPIA, such as adding another public representative to the association's board, requiring the association to post annual updates about its activities, funding upgrades to its computer systems, expanding its coverage to commercial properties, and requiring it to offer policy packages that don't include volcano-related coverage.

Ilagan said that last one won't help out mortgagees at risk of losing coverage, but could help others find more affordable coverage outside of Lava Zones 1 and 2.

The last bill, HB 2056, would establish a "State Reinsurance Exploratory Working Group" to investigate the

possibility of a state-run reinsurance program that would help insulate providers from liabilities associated with operating in high-risk areas.

Whether any of these bills will alleviate the crisis remains to be seen — none have yet been discussed at House committees, although two have hearings scheduled for Wednesday.

"I think they're a good start," said Andrea Rosanoff, chair of the Puna Citizens for Affordable and Sustainable Property Insurance.

Rosanoff said she and other Puna residents helped craft the bills, noting that while the problem rose to the level of a crisis last year, it has been brewing for years.

HPIA's reinsurance expenses first increased by 144 percent around 2014 — corresponding with a nondamaging lava flow that broke out near Pahoehoe — and again by 111 percent following the 2018 Kilauea eruption, according to data collected by Rosanoff.

With rising reinsurance costs, Rosanoff said HPIA made up its own operating losses by increasing its rates, leading to the current problem.

Rosanoff noted that the number of insurance claims to HPIA regarding the Lahaina wildfires will doubtless dwarf those made in Puna, which she said is an opportunity for the state to reform how it handles insurance entirely.

"What it's opened up is this question about the whole future of Hawaii, even the world: How are we going to insure homes in this era of climate change?" Rosanoff said.

Rosanoff pushed back against critics who argue that Puna residents know the risks inherent to the district and therefore "deserve" higher insurance rates.

"The county and state have been approving permits here for decades," Rosanoff said. "Puna's also one of the last places on the island you can get affordable housing. ... We're not just foolish people who were stupid to buy in a lava zone. Insurance has to be nondiscriminatory."

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January 30, 2024 | Hawaii Tribune-Herald (Hilo, HI)

Author: MICHAEL BRESTOVANSKY Hawaii Tribune-Herald | 794 Words

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Bills aim to assist Hawaii property owners with policy costs

January 29, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)
Author: Dan Nakaso | Section: Hawaii News | 701 Words
[OpenURL Link](#)

A package of House bills would help property

owners buy insurance in Hawaii's most high-risk zones,

including those in Puna's riskiest lava zones and survivors of the Maui wildfires who also lost homes.

State Rep. Gregg Ilagan (D,

Hawaiian Paradise Park-Hawaiian Beaches-Leilani Estates) has introduced 10 bills ahead of one

insurer's plan to exit Hawaii's property insurance market this summer.

Most of the bills are specific to Puna's Lava Zones 1 and 2, where lava from Kilauea burst out of the ground in Leilani Estates in May 2018 before the eruption suddenly slowed, then stopped four months later. In between, 723 structures were wiped out, including an estimated 200 primary residences.

Universal Property & Casualty, which will pull out of the Hawaii market Aug. 31, had been issuing policies for Puna's Lava Zones 1 and 2, and some remaining insurance companies will honor existing policies, Ilagan said. But none are willing to underwrite new ones, he said.

Other companies around Hawaii continue to issue homeowners insurance, but Universal's pending departure means the pool of companies "is shrinking," Ilagan said. "It's definitely shrinking."

Puna residents filed 152 insurance claims from the Kilauea eruption totaling

\$35 million, Ilagan said.

On Maui, property owners are expected to file \$1.3 billion in insurance claims, he said.

Since the Aug. 8 wildfires, Gov. Josh Green has repeatedly warned property owners across the islands that insurance premiums are

going to rise.

State Insurance Commissioner Gordon Ito said the devastating Maui wildfires are "going to have a ripple effect across the whole state."

At the same time, Ito

said, insurance rates in Hawaii "cannot be excessive, inadequate or unfairly

discriminatory."

Property owners can help reduce their wildfire risks by creating buffer zones around their homes by trimming back brush and asking their insurers for discounts, Ito said.

Another bill, introduced by state Rep. Kyle Yamashita (D, Pukalani-Makawao-Ulupalakua), would create "the State Self-Insurance Against Property and Casualty Risks Special Fund to ... make it easier for the state to self-insure or utilize a

captive insurer to mitigate against property and casualty risks." HB 565 stalled in 2023 but remains alive.

The Legislature in 1991 created the nonprofit Hawaii Property Insurance Association to provide insurance for property owners in Puna's Lava Zones 1 and 2 who were unable to buy insurance otherwise, Ilagan said.

Private insurance companies who want to sell policies in Hawaii are required to join the HPIA to help cover the overall cost of claims.

House Bill 2054 would

require the HPIA "to offer additional types of homeowners insurance policy options that exclude lava coverage."

HB 2056 would create a working group to look at the possibility of a state-run

"reinsurance program to

ensure affordable coverage for property owners against catastrophic events."

Reinsurance programs help insurance companies cover losses and claims, but — especially with climate change — "there are only a few reinsurance companies left in the world, and the money is drying up," Ilagan said.

HB 2048 calls for

one HPIA member to be

appointed by the Senate president and one by the speaker of the House, rather than the state insurance commissioner.

HB 2049 would require the HPIA to be more transparent and post more information on its website.

Other bills are specific to Puna's Lava Zones 1 and 2 or to Hawaii island property owners in general:

HB 2053 would cap insurance premiums for residential properties "located in lava zones on Hawaii island based on premiums of comparable residential properties not located in lava zones on Hawaii

island."

HB 2052 would bar insurance companies from offering coverage, or refusing to renew a policy "solely on the basis that the applicant's or insured's real property is located in a lava-flow hazard zone."

In announcing the upcoming departure of Universal Property & Casualty, the state Department of Commerce and Consumers Affairs — which oversees the Hawaii Insurance Division — said property owners "may qualify for coverage from the Hawaii Property Insurance Association (hpiainfo.com)."

"The Hawai'i Insurance Division publishes a range of insurance guides and premium comparison sheets for public review online

at cca.hawaii.gov/ins/

resources," DCCA said. "Consumers can utilize these informational guides to review and compare sample premiums

from insurance companies licensed in Hawai'i."

In a statement, Insurance Commissioner Ito said in 2023:

"We remind consumers

to be careful of potential scams. Many scammers prey on a consumer's fear. Before doing business with an insurance agent or company, consumers should

verify that they are an authorized and licensed insurance broker."

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**

Dan Nakaso, 'Bills aim to assist Hawaii property owners with policy costs', *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* (online), 29 Jan 2024
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A town is trying not to lose fight on its eroding beaches

January 28, 2024 | Garden Island, The (Lihue, HI)

Author: Wyatt Haupt Jr. | Section: Hawaii News | 825 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

NORTH WILDWOOD, N.J. — A New Jersey shore town locked in a legal battle with the state over tens of millions of dollars it has spent trying — mostly in vain — to hold back the ocean now is more vulnerable than ever.

A recent winter storm destroyed part of the sand dunes in North Wildwood, leaving tiny piles about the size of a child's sand castle to protect a popular resort town with \$2.5 billion worth of private property, and at least that much in government buildings and infrastructure.

New Jersey has fined the town \$12 million for unauthorized beach repairs that it says could worsen erosion, while the city is suing to recoup the \$30 million it has spent trucking sand to the site for over a decade.

While they wait for a judge to sort things out amid climate change that brings rising sea levels and more intense storms, North Wildwood's plight is a stark reminder that in the man vs. nature battle, in the long run, nature usually wins.

"This is the most vulnerable we have ever been," Mayor Patrick Rosenello said. "It doesn't even take a storm anymore to threaten us. On most regular high tides, the water comes up and through where this dune used to be."

He walked along the beach where the surging surf punched a hole in the dunes, completely obliterating them for about 20 feet. On either side, all that remained were sand piles that barely reached his knees. Elsewhere along the beachfront, dunes that had been about 18 feet high last summer were less than half that height — and much lower than that in numerous places.

Previously, the city said it has spent \$21 million trucking in sand for emergency repairs to its beaches. That has since risen to \$30 million, Rosenello said.

But trucking in sand is no longer an option, the mayor said, adding that erosion has created choke points along the beach that are too narrow to let dump trucks pass.

North Wildwood has asked the state for emergency permission to build a steel bulkhead along the most heavily eroded section of its beachfront — something previously done in two other spots.

But the state Department of Environmental Protection has tended to oppose bulkheads as a long-term solution, noting that the hard structures often encourage sand scouring against them that can accelerate and worsen erosion.

The agency prefers the sort of beach replenishment projects carried out for decades by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, where massive amounts of sand are pumped from offshore onto eroded beaches, widening them and creating sand dunes to protect the property behind them.

Virtually the entire 127-mile New Jersey coastline has received such projects. But in North Wildwood, legal approvals and property easements from private landowners have thus far prevented one from happening.

Although the last two towns required to sign off on a sand replenishment project did so 11 months ago, the project still needs a final go-ahead. When it gets that, the work will probably take two years to complete, officials say.

On several occasions, North Wildwood carried out emergency repairs, including construction of an earlier bulkhead

without approval from the state.

Shawn LaTourette, New Jersey's environment protection commissioner, warned the town last July that unauthorized work could have more serious consequences if it continues, including potential loss of future shore protection funding.

LaTourette wrote that the city "has repeatedly engaged in destructive and illegal conduct in the name of tourism and, supposedly, public safety. This is wrongheaded and it must stop."

The Department of Environmental Protection says heavy equipment moving sand around has weakened and reduced the height of the dunes, actually making things worse while destroying natural plants and animal habitat.

But North Wildwood sees itself as facing an existential threat with an unprotected coastline.

"Our fear is that there will be no more Wildwood," said Maureen Lipert, who was out for a walk along the beach Monday. "All of North Wildwood could be wiped out if the water keeps coming over."

"The water is going to hit our hotels and motels," added another resident, Kim Milligan. "There's new homes being built here every day. Our homes are going to be ruined."

After Superstorm Sandy devastated the Jersey Shore in 2012, the Army Corps began a program to rebuild dunes along virtually the entire coastline. Numerous scientific studies found that oceanfront communities with dunes already protecting them fared much better during Sandy than those that did not.

Sand replenishment has been the government's go-to method of shore protection for decades. Critics say it's inherently wasteful to keep pumping sand ashore that will inevitably wash away. But Congress keeps appropriating money for such work, arguing it is effective in protecting lives and property, not to mention sustaining the crucial tourism industry.

Milligan, who lives several blocks inland from the ocean, only half-jokingly found a potential silver lining if the worst comes to pass in North Wildwood.

"I'll have beachfront access," she said.

AP video journalist Tassanee Vejpongsa contributed to this story.

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Almost 340 bills are introduced to Hawaii lawmakers by the governor

January 27, 2024 | Hawaii Tribune-Herald (Hilo, HI)

Author: ANDREW GOMES The Honolulu Star-Advertiser/TNS | 1033 Words

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"I'm humbly calling on my colleagues here at the Legislature to help us by implementing new policies and reforms which will return our housing units to the long-term rental market for our people," Green said Monday to lawmakers. "This will increase supply and bring down prices in our local market, which is artificially and unfairly inflated by the global demand from visitors to our state."

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**

ANDREW GOMES; The Honolulu Star-Advertiser/TNS, 'Almost 340 bills are introduced to Hawaii lawmakers by the governor',

Envoys to Japan and S. Korea urge Hawaii students to serve

January 27, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Author: Kevin Knodell | Section: Hawaii News | 856 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

During a visit to Hawaii this week, the U.S. ambassadors to Japan and South Korea — who have had very different careers — gave a talk to students at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel is a longtime Democratic political operative who has been a congressman, White House chief of staff and mayor of Chicago. He had little experience in diplomacy before his appointment as ambassador by President Joe Biden.

By contrast, Ambassador to South Korea Philip Goldberg is a career Foreign Service officer who has been stationed around the world, including as ambassador in the Philippines, Bolivia and Colombia. Nevertheless, Goldberg praised Emanuel, saying, "He proves the point that there is a reason that we have politically appointed ambassadors, as well as career ambassadors — although I prefer the latter much more of the time."

At the Monday event, which was hosted by the East-West Center, the two ambassadors discussed their role in efforts to strengthen trilateral relations among the United States, Japan and South Korea. But they also encouraged students to get involved — both in Hawaii and around the world.

"There's a lot of different ways to serve," said Emanuel. "I think whether it's in foreign service, whether it's with a climate change NGO, whether it's working on international trade across boundaries, you have an obligation as a citizen, to give something back."

During the question-and-answer portion of the visit, UH student Monica Orillo moderated. Orillo is on the cusp of receiving her master's degree and has already been accepted into the Foreign Service.

"For someone who's about to go do, hopefully, what they're doing, it was a really cool experience, kind of being able to connect my academic career to my professional career," she said. "It was really cool to kind of experience moderating an event, which is something that I'm sure I'll be doing kind of a lot of as a public diplomacy officer."

Hawaii lawmakers have been working to build up foreign policy institutions and education programs in the islands as the U.S. hones its Pacific strategy. Regional leaders have increasingly held meetings in Honolulu.

In October the EWC hosted officials from the U.S. Agency for International Development along with senior officials from Japan's and South Korea's international development agencies.

"Hawaii is not only a travel hub for the Indo-Pacific, but your state's rich cultural diversity also gives you unique insights into the region, particularly when it comes to Japan and Korea," said Goldberg. "You have that entry point into the region for students and scholars that provides proximity but also familiarity with the issues."

But Hawaii's growing importance as an international hub has as much — if not more — to do with the military. Oahu is the home of U.S. Indo-Pacific command, which oversees all operations across the region.

The islands have also seen an increase in international military exercises — with Japanese and South Korean military service members regular visitors to Hawaii. Closer trilateral relations among Washington, Tokyo and Seoul have been spurred along in no small part by tensions with China and North Korea.

"I was excited that this event happened," said Nikhil Stevens, a junior at UH studying religion and political science. "I think I was sort of wanting a little bit more perspective on the trilateral military (relations and operations) and

what that means in terms of the security dilemma on China's side. But I also understand it was incredibly short engagement, and they might not want it to open up like Pandora's box."

The ambassadors touted economic ties among the three countries. According to the most recent data from the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, as of 2022 Japan is Hawaii's No. 1 international export market; South Korea is now Hawaii's No. 1 source of international imports.

Educational ties also are strong. Hawaii hosts more than 1,000 students a year from Japan and Korea who choose to study in the islands. Meanwhile, students from Hawaii also are pursuing studies in Japan and Korea.

"(It's) important to remember that our diplomatic partnerships are not just about dialogues and summits. Instead, they're really about all of you, about how you'll work across borders with friends and partners to navigate an increasingly complex and interconnected world," Goldberg told students. "I know the concept of 'global' is not all that popular in many quarters these days, but we are interconnected regardless of movements to try to disconnect."

After the event, Goldberg stuck around to talk to students at a career fair for those interested in getting involved in international issues.

"I used to think that studying in Hawaii, I was really worried about being a little bit too far removed. I couldn't have been more wrong; I think this is a really great place to be studying Indo-Pacific international affairs," said Orillo. "I think having more students from here go into places like Washington, D.C., and then being able to serve as a voice for their community in those spaces that might not have a lot of knowledge about Hawaii otherwise, is really important. I noticed that when I did my summer internship in Washington, it was something that was very desperately needed."

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January 27, 2024 | West Hawaii Today (Kailua-Kona, HI)

Author: Andrew Gomes The Honolulu Star-Advertiser/TNS | Section: NewsNews | 1035 Words

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January 26, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Author: Andrew Gomes | Section: Hawaii News | 1023 Words

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Editorial: Fines set tone, stir action on shoreline erosion

January 26, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Section: Editorial | 657 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

A \$1 million fine will get a landowner's attention. With two penalties of nearly \$1 million each against North Shore homeowners who've committed repeated shoreline violations, Hawaii's Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) has opted to take that hard-line approach — properly, because of the damage to an irreplaceable public beach and oceanfront that shoreline hardening causes.

The high fines signal that the BLNR is finally committing to holding landowners responsible for damaging Oahu's besieged North Shore oceanfront. The state must now stand firm on beach protection, bringing Hawaii's era of permissiveness over shoreline-hardening to a definitive close.

The situation has reached a point of urgency. Many of the island's beaches are on a disappearing trajectory, after a century of beach loss caused by seawalls and dredging, building too close to shorelines followed by construction of barriers and groins, and hardening with sandbags, concrete or boulder placement. To date, Oahu has lost about 25% of its beachfront to shoreline hardening — and the North Shore is now suffering dramatic losses. "During the last several years, beach erosion in this area appears to have intensified significantly," the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) states.

Enforcement against homeowners who violate shoreline protection law is just one of the tools that must be put into play, and it's proving necessary: For the past three years, the DLNR has refused to allow or renew any temporary emergency beach interventions, but property owners, including those fined, continued to install unauthorized structures.

The homeowners, both with properties on Ke Nui Road fronting Sunset Beach, were fined on Jan. 12: \$948,000 for Sunset Oasis LLC's William and Melinda Kernot; and \$993,000 for Zhungo LLC's Rodney Youman. Both owners' fines included penalties of \$1,000 for each day that a July 18, 2021, order to remove structures wasn't followed.

Although both have requested contested case hearings, the penalties are justified. BLNR has offered to reduce the fines and to apply costs incurred if the homeowners agree to remove homes from the shoreline and to dismantle erosion control structures from the beach and oceanfront, which is state land up to the high-water mark.

Over the past year, the BLNR has fined three other Ke Nui Road homeowners for unauthorized shoreline work, including a \$77,000 fine for pouring concrete on the beach, issued in January. All requested contested cases, with two pending; the third lost, and has been ordered to create a plan to remove structures.

Another aspect that needs attention is the contested-

case process itself, which has enabled violators to stall and stretch out cases for years. Ways to speed up a plodding process must be considered, to add teeth to collecting fines and to enforce remedies in a more timely manner.

In 2020, after an investigative series by the Star-Advertiser and ProPublica revealed that DLNR issued dozens of "emergency" permits for interventions to private property owners between 2000 and 2020, despite a zero-tolerance policy for seawalls adopted in 1999, the state began reexamining its approach to beach hardening by private landowners. The problem had been allowed to intensify, as state officials allowed hardening structures that were meant to be temporary to remain for years and even decades, with little consequence if rules were ignored. Since then, DLNR and BLNR have gradually stepped up enforcement.

A \$1 million fine is an impactful penalty, and reflects a forceful commitment by BLNR to throttle back damaging and unlawful shoreline alterations. That's as it should be. Firm and persistent action is required in this era of climate change and sea level rise to prevent further losses.

Over the long run, and with the survival of Oahu's treasured North Shore beaches and surf breaks at stake, the need for concerted action by the state and city looms. This is where, for example, Gov. Josh Green's proposed \$25 visitor impact fee may play a part. The Legislature must adopt this fee and make good use of the additional funds it would provide by making plans for a challenging future.

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'Editorial: Fines set tone, stir action on shoreline erosion', *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* (online), 26 Jan 2024

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Governor highlights challenges, possible solutions in State of the State address

January 23, 2024 | Hawaii Tribune-Herald (Hilo, HI)

Author: MICHAEL BRESTOVANSKY Hawaii Tribune-Herald | 828 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Gov. Josh Green made bold proposals for how to increase housing availability during a speech Monday.

During a State of the State address Monday to mark the opening of the 2024 legislative session, Green highlighted several key issues he hopes to focus on this year and commemorated the victims of last year's Lahaina wildfires.

Those fires, Green said, have cast into stark relief one of the state's most pressing concerns: the lack of affordable housing available to Hawaii residents.

"Let me break down how it is on Maui," Green said. "There are 27,000 short-term rental units on that island alone, and - if we can dedicate just 10% of these homes to displaced Lahaina families - we can house everyone (displaced by the fires)." About 6,000 of them are still living in hotels and condos.

Green urged Maui owners of vacation rental units to offer those units to the state's Maui Interim Housing Plan, a \$500 million program that aims to move all fire-displaced families into long-term housing by July. He said the state will cover the fair market value of every unit offered for two years and provide a property tax exemption for 18 months to the owners.

That isn't the only tax break Green offered vacation rental owners. The "House Hawaii's Ohana Plan," which he announced Monday, would provide tax amnesty - an exemption from capital gains, conveyance and general excise taxes - to any short-term rental owner who sells those rentals to bring them into the general housing market.

That plan, Green said, will last two years and begin in the fall.

"I will sign into law any bill the Legislature sends me that will help move short-term rentals and vacant investment properties owned by nonresidents into our local housing market - to increase supply and bring down prices for our families," Green said, adding that 52% of all short-term rentals in the state are owned by non-Hawaii residents and rented to visitors at four times the price that a local family would pay for a long-term rental.

Housing, Green said, remains the administration's top priority. While he noted that simply building more housing won't be enough to meet the needs of residents, he added that the supplemental budget for fiscal year 2025 includes \$373 million for infrastructure and housing projects.

Green also announced other plans to address other problems throughout the state. In order to better protect the state from the affects of climate change, Green said he will once again pursue a climate impact fee to be imposed upon visitors.

Green proposed a \$25 fee be charged to visitors when they check into a hotel or short-term rental. That fee, he said, would generate more than \$68 million per year, which would be directed toward beach preservation, firebreaks and other measures to help prevent another tragedy like Lahaina.

"I believe this is not too much to ask of visitors to our islands," Green said. "I am open to other proposals that would achieve the same goals, including an increase in the transient accommodation tax - but we must do something now."

Other ongoing programs to address statewide problems should bear fruit this year, Green said. He noted that the second phase of last year's Green Affordability Plan will kick in this year, offering up to \$115 million in child and

dependent tax credits to working families.

Green also praised the Healthcare Education Loan Repayment Program, which began in September and provides medical professionals up to \$50,000 in loan repayments per year, which he said hopefully will alleviate the extreme shortage of doctors in Hawaii.

"Over the past five and a half months, we have shown the rest of the country and the entire world the true spirit of aloha," Green concluded. "We've come together around our shared values and a common purpose - to support Maui as they begin to recover and heal, to house our people and end homelessness, and to make life in Hawaii more affordable, so that our next generation can build a future here at home."

Puna Rep. and Vice Speaker of the House Greggor Ilagan said many of Green's proposals already are included in the House's majority legislative package, including the vacation rental tax exemption plan.

"Today was the first I've heard of that plan, but it's all trying to address the housing issue," Ilagan told the Tribune-Herald, adding that the majority package also will include proposals that would give the counties authority to gradually phase out the use of Non-Conforming Use Certificates, which could end the operation of short-term rentals outside of resort districts.

Ilagan said that for his constituents, he was most pleased to hear Green's concern about health care availability, saying that a drive to the hospital for Puna residents can take more than an hour.

"We want to work closely with the governor this session and do whatever we can to fix this," Ilagan said.

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State of the State address: Gov. Josh Green focused on Maui's recovery

January 23, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Author: Dan Nakaso | Section: Hawaii News | 1292 Words

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Gov. Josh Green received a standing ovation at the state Capitol from legislators and visitors Monday following his second State of the State speech, which focused on Maui's recovery, making life more affordable for everyone, housing and the need to reduce homelessness in an address that was routinely punctuated with applause.

During his nearly hourlong speech, Green also received applause after telling legislators from the House floor that he will issue a moratorium on short-term vacation rentals in West Maui if he does not get 3,000 property owners to voluntarily convert vacation rentals to long-term housing by March 1 in

order to house 3,000 families that survived the Aug. 8 wildfires who continue to live in Maui hotels.

As of Friday, 1,367 owners of Maui short-term rental units had agreed to take advantage of a county property tax moratorium and above-market rents, Green told reporters after his speech.

After the Maui County Council agreed to temporarily waive property taxes for owners who convert their units for 18 months, Green said the number of property owners willing to house Maui families grew to 15, then 150 and over 600 before reaching Friday's number.

Green sees converting short-term rentals to long-term units as the quickest and simplest way to fill the need for 50,000 affordable housing units across the state — and Maui as a way to test new ways to do it.

Currently, 52% of all short-term rentals are owned by nonresidents, and 27% own 20 or more units, Green said.

For Maui, Green told reporters, "I hope we overshoot and have too many offers of housing" to meet the March 1 deadline.

"Then I will become a mellow governor again," he said.

In his speech, Green said there are 27,000 short-term rental units on Maui alone.

"We have to take further action to return the thousands of short-term rentals to the local housing market," he said.

For Hawaii's long-term housing needs, Green said, "I feel that if even just 20% of the short-term rentals out there over two years sold into our market, you're talking about tens of thousands

of new homes for local people."

If not, Green said his future

approach to change short-term vacation rentals into long-term housing for Hawaii families will

be "onerous," especially for short-term property owners who live out of state.

He told legislators: "I am calling on my colleagues at the Legislature to help us by implementing new policies and reforms which will return housing units to the long-term rental market for our people. This will increase supply and bring down prices in a local market artificially and unfairly inflated by the global demand from visitors to our state.

"I will sign into law any bill the Legislature sends to me that will help move short-term rentals and vacant investment properties owned by nonresidents into our

local housing market. This will increase supply and bring down prices for our families," he said to more applause.

Green also plans to introduce "landmark" legislation to provide a "tax amnesty to any owner of a short-term rental who chooses to sell it to help us with our housing crisis.

"A sale of this kind — to an 'owner-occupier' local family or to someone who turns the home into a long-term rental for a local family — will be exempted from capital gains tax, conveyance tax and general excise tax. This 'House Hawaii's Ohana' plan would start this fall and last 24 months.

"During this tax amnesty period, I'll personally encourage short-term rental owners from around the world to sell their properties back to Hawaii families," Green said to further applause.

The State of the State speech included Green's approaches to serious issues that are driving away local residents to more affordable places, such as Las Vegas.

But the speech began on a light note when House Speaker Scott Saiki continued his back-and-forth banter with his former longtime House ally Sylvia Luke, whose family emigrated from South Korea when she was a child, when she did not speak English.

Saiki introduced now-

Lt. Gov. Luke before Green's speech by calling her Kim Yo Jong, the sister of Kim Jong Un, North Korea's supreme leader, before correcting himself to laughter from the audience.

Saiki later told reporters, "There's some resemblance, some similarities there."

He was surrounded by House leaders who said they agree with Green's goals, but there may be different tactics that will be debated during the legislative session, including the best way to charge tourists a special fee to both offset their impact on Hawaii's fragile environment and what Green believes will help deter visitors as arrival numbers continue to creep up to a pre-COVID-19 record level of over 10 million tourists annually.

Like Green's so-called "climate impact fee" for tourists, many of Green's ideas on generating more affordable housing, reducing homelessness, addressing mental health and helping low-income families are similar to what's in the House Democrats' bill package, said House Majority Leader Nadine Nakamura (D, Hanalei-Princeville-Kapaa).

Green's speech began on a somber note, reflecting on the Aug. 8 Maui wildfires, which killed at least 100 people and will take residents years to recover from.

"Today I am here to report that although we have faced great challenges and suffered even greater loss over the past year, we have come together as one ohana to recover and to heal," Green said.

"I am here to report that the state of Hawaii is strong," he said to applause.

"Words cannot adequately describe the devastation caused by the fires, and it scorched thousands of acres and destroyed nearly all of Lahaina," Green said.

Legislators and visitors gave a standing ovation after Green said:

"Two of the brave Maui firefighters are with us

today: Keahi Ho and Koa Bonnell. Please stand so we can recognize you and all of your fellow firefighters who put

yourselves in harm's way to save others. ... These men and women knew what they were facing when they went into the fire. Many knew their own homes would be destroyed, and some didn't know if their family was safe, but they went in anyway."

Much of Green's speech focused on financial relief for island residents, often at the expense of tourists and out-of-state property owners.

"Despite working multiple jobs, more are living paycheck to paycheck than before the pandemic," Green said.

Some 44% of all Hawaii families are considered

"asset-limited, income-

constrained, employed" and are "barely getting by — and 63% of all Hawaiian families fall into this category," he said. "This has to change.

"We must find additional ways to reduce the cost of housing, food and health care, and make Hawaii more affordable for all of our people," Green said to more

applause.

In 2023 the Legislature passed the first phase of his plan to provide \$104 million in direct income tax relief to Hawaii's so-called ALICE families.

This year Green wants

to double Hawaii's earned income tax credit and food tax credit, worth more than \$87 million annually, "so that working families with keiki can afford to live in Hawaii and our next generation can have a future here."

State Sen. Kurt Fevella (R, Ewa Beach-Ocean Pointe-

Iroquois Point) — one of the Senate's two Republicans — then walked out after Green said to applause that he wants to index the state tax code to provide all taxpayers relief from inflation, which Green called "a long-overdue change which will help people in every tax bracket."

On Monday, Green proposed a \$25 fee on visitors "when they arrive and check into a hotel or short-term rental. This modest fee — far less than the resort fees or other taxes visitors have paid for years — will generate more than \$68 million every year from visitors."

Green also remains open to any other ideas from the Legislature to generate fees from tourism to address climate change, including raising or altering the transit accommodations, or hotel, tax, aimed at tourists.

"This responsibility to protect Hawaii's unique

natural environment should extend to visitors to our islands," Green said.

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Australian leader pushes for talks in the Pacific

January 23, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Author: Kevin Knodell | Section: Hawaii News | 1491 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that as American leaders talk about U.S. strategy in the Pacific, they should have more of those conversations in the Pacific.

Morrison, who served as prime minister from 2018 to 2022 and remains in government as a member of Australia's parliament representing New South Wales, was on Oahu last week attending a two-day defense conference hosted by Honolulu think tank Pacific Forum that brought together military officials, academics and defense industry executives from around the world.

In an interview with the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, he said that while he thinks there's a lot of expertise in places like Washington and New York, "if you're looking at where the rubber hits the road, this is where it does."

Oahu is the nerve center for U.S. military operations in the region, and money has flooded in for defense contracts as training operations have ramped up in the islands. But it's also a diplomatic hub with eight countries maintaining formal diplomatic outposts in Hawaii, and many others have appointed honorary consuls in the islands.

Morrison said that particularly for Pacific island nations, having officials from around the world come to their region to talk about policy is important as they face challenges like climate change and illegal fishing operations depleting fisheries communities depend on for food and work.

In October, officials met at the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii Manoa for the long-anticipated signing of a new 20-year extension of the Compact of Free Association agreements between the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the United States. Marshall Islands then-President David Kabua, a University of Hawaii graduate, was among those present.

"They can go to the White House, they can go to Beijing, but they're much happier sitting and talking in their own region, and I think that's the best place to have those discussions with them," said Morrison. "It's important to have those discussions because it does impact them, and that's true about talking about climate is talking about security."

Morrison played a key role in establishing the trilateral AUKUS agreement among the Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The three countries agreed to share technology and resources to build and operate new nuclear submarines. It also calls for increased cooperation on cyber operations, hypersonic and counter-hypersonic missile technology, electronic warfare and information sharing.

Morrison said, "There's only one nation in the world that can potentially look after its own defense unilaterally in terms of the threats that are faced — it's the United States. Any other nation that pretends otherwise and thinks that its defense strategy can be built otherwise, I think is being naive and maybe a little romantic."

The agreement is largely focused on supporting operations in the Pacific amid tensions with China.

Beijing has become locked in a series of disputes with neighboring countries over maritime navigation and territorial rights in the South China Sea, a critical trade route that more than one-third of all trade moves through. China has claimed the entire waterway over the objections of neighboring countries that also use resources and shipping routes in the sea.

The U.S. and its allies, particularly Australia and Japan, have increased operations in the region, including so-called

"freedom of navigation operations." China has accused those countries — particularly the United States — of stirring up trouble. Intellectuals in both the U.S. and China have drawn parallels between the current increased tensions and the Cold War.

During a visit to Honolulu in July, Australian Ambassador Kevin Rudd, who also formerly served as the country's prime minister, argued that "this ain't a Cold War." He argued that while the U.S. and China are competing for influence around the globe, the competition has been largely bloodless and that "the United States remains China's largest trading partner, and China remains a major trading partner of the United States. So for those reasons we should be careful about using language which simply creates a trajectory for the future."

But during a Jan. 16 dinner at the Pacific Forum's conference held at the 'Alohilani Resort Waikiki Beach, Morrison told attendees that while the current situation isn't exactly the same as the Cold War, U.S. and Chinese interests are fundamentally at odds, and the prospect of that changing in the foreseeable future is "unlikely."

"It's kind to call it unlikely; it's diplomatic to call it unlikely," said Morrison. "But the implication of that is, well, if that's the case, the pretense that you can have these kumbaya sort of arrangements with the PRC are not only unlikely, they're actually quite unhelpful. Because it was that pervasive assumption over the globalization era that allowed the PRC to just continue to take slices."

The Chinese military has pushed into territories claimed by neighboring countries and built bases on disputed islands and reefs. A 2016 international court ruling in favor of the Philippines found that China's claims had "no legal basis," but the Chinese military has doubled down with ships occasionally harassing and attacking fishermen and other maritime workers from neighboring countries.

Morrison said, "We saw a constant pushing out, out, out, and no one said 'no' ... in a way that was important and could really change the tide. And so we all woke up to that, and we worked out that we had to start saying 'no' and there had to be a credible, effective deterrent that existed."

In November, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said the situation was getting worse and that China was pushing farther into his country's territory during a speech at the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Waikiki during a stop in Hawaii on his way back to Manila from the 2023 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in San Francisco.

"Unfortunately, I cannot report that the situation is improving," said Marcos. "The situation has become more dire than it was before. The nearest reefs that the (Chinese military) have started to show interest in, in terms of slowly using these atolls and shoals for building bases ... are approaching closer and closer to the Philippine coastline. And the nearest one is now around 60 nautical miles from the nearest Philippine coast."

Ongoing attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea by Yemeni-based Houthi militants have already led to massive spikes in costs and are affecting the global economy. But Morrison said that pales in comparison with the potential destruction and economic fallout of a major conflict in the Pacific. The establishment of blockades or the breakout of open conflict in the South China Sea could shut down the world's busiest trade route and throw the global economy into chaos.

"As awful as the conflicts are in the Middle East and Ukraine, compared to a possible hot conflict in the Taiwan Strait? There is not a part of the globe that would not be affected by that," Morrison told the Star-Advertiser. "So it is important to address these sorts of conflicts, like trying to achieve peace in the Sudan. There's no shortage of conflicts all around the world. But in terms of what conflicts completely can change life as we know it all around the world, well, that's here."

One of the potential flashpoints that most worries many observers is Taiwan. The Taiwan Strait is one of the world's busiest shipping routes, and for the U.S. and many other countries, Taiwan itself is a key trading partner and one of the main sources of semiconductors many companies rely on to make their products work.

This month the country held elections in which current Vice President Lai Ching-te won the vote, giving Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party a historic third consecutive presidential victory. Lai told supporters at a rally after his win that "this is a night that belongs to Taiwan. We managed to keep Taiwan on the map of the world. The election has shown the world the commitment of the Taiwanese people to democracy, which I hope China can understand."

Beijing considers self-ruled Taiwan to be a rogue province, and Chinese leader Xi Jinping has vowed to bring it under its control by military force if necessary. China has been building up its missile and naval forces around the Taiwan Strait. Some American officials have asserted that Beijing intends to launch a full-scale invasion of Taiwan by the end of the decade. But Morrison expressed doubt.

"That capability doesn't exist yet," said Morrison. "They've got a clear time frame to achieve it, but having the time frame to achieve the capability is not the same as having intent to use it. I still believe that it would be China's objective for reunification to be without conflict. Because that conflict scenario is not a good one. For (China) the economic catastrophe alone of that event would make COVID look like a sniff. It would be catastrophic ... so I think their intention is to bully and coerce and to do all of that and try to force an outcome that doesn't require (war), and I still believe they think they can achieve it that way."

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Governor highlights challenges, possible solutions in State of the State address

January 23, 2024 | West Hawaii Today (Kailua-Kona, HI)

Author: MICHAEL BRESTOVANSKY Hawaii Tribune-Herald | Section: NewsNews | 832 Words

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Those fires, Green said, have cast into stark relief one of the state's most pressing concerns: the lack of affordable housing available to Hawaii residents.

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Email Michael Brestovansky at mbrestovansky@hawaiiitribune-herald.com.

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In small-town Wisconsin, looking for the roots of the modern American conspiracy theory

January 22, 2024 | West Hawaii Today (Kailua-Kona, HI)

Author: TIM SULLIVAN AP National Writer | 1271 Words

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APPLETON, Wis. - The decades fall away as you open the front doors.

It's the late 1950s in the cramped little offices - or maybe the pre-hippie 1960s. It's a place where army-style buzz cuts are still in fashion, communism remains the primary enemy and the decor is dominated by American flags and portraits of once-famous Cold Warriors.

At the John Birch Society, they've been waging war for more than 60 years against what they're sure is a vast, diabolical conspiracy. As they tell it, it's a plot with tentacles that reach from 19th-century railroad magnates to the Biden White House, from the Federal Reserve to COVID vaccines.

Long before QAnon, Pizzagate and the modern crop of politicians who will happily repeat apocalyptic talking points, there was Birch. And outside these cramped small-town offices is a national political landscape that the Society helped shape.

"We have a bad reputation. You know: 'You guys are insane,'" says Wayne Morrow, a Society vice president. He is standing in the group's warehouse amid 10-foot (3-meter) shelves of Birch literature waiting to be distributed.

"But all the things that we wrote about are coming to pass." • • •

Back when the Cold War loomed and TV was still mostly in black and white, the John Birch Society mattered. There were dinners at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York and meetings with powerful politicians. There was a headquarters on each coast, a chain of bookstores, hundreds of local chapters, radio shows, summer camps for members' children.

Well-funded and well-organized, they sent forth fevered warnings about a secret communist plot to take over America. It made them heroes to broad swaths of conservatives, even as they became a punchline to a generation of comedians.

"They created this alternative political tradition," says Matthew Dallek, a historian at George Washington University and author of "Birchers: How the John Birch Society Radicalized the American Right." He says it forged a right-wing culture that fell, at first, well outside mainstream Republican politics.

Conspiracy theories have a long history in the United States, going back at least to 1800, when secret forces were said to be backing Thomas Jefferson's presidential bid. It was a time when such talk moved slowly, spread through sermons, letters and tavern visits.

No more. Fueled by social media and the rise of celebrity conspiracists, the last two decades have seen ever-increasing numbers of Americans lose faith in everything from government institutions to journalism. And year after year, ideas once relegated to fringe newsletters, little-known websites and the occasional AM radio station pushed their way into the mainstream.

Today, outlandish conspiracy theories are quoted by more than a few U.S. senators, and millions of Americans believe the COVID pandemic was orchestrated by powerful elites. Prominent cable news commentators speak darkly of government agents seizing citizens off the streets.

But the John Birch Society itself is largely forgotten, relegated to a pair of squat buildings along a busy commercial

street in small-town Wisconsin.

So why even take note of it today? Because many of its ideas - from anger at a mysterious, powerful elite to fears that America's main enemy was hidden within the country, biding its time - percolated into pockets of American culture over the last half-century. Those who came later simply out-Birched the Birchers. Says Dallek: "Their successors were politically savvy and took Birch ideas and updated them for contemporary politics."

The result has been a new political terrain. What was once at the edges had worked its way toward the heart of the discourse.

To some, the fringe has gone all the way to the White House. In the Society's offices, they'll tell you that Donald Trump would never have been elected if they hadn't paved the way.

"The bulk of Trump's campaign was Birch," Art Thompson, a retired Society CEO who remains one of its most prominent voices, says proudly. "All he did was bring it out into the open."

There's some truth in that, even if Thompson is overstating things.

The Society had spent decades calling for a populist president who would preach patriotism, oppose immigration, pull out of international treaties and root out the forces trying to undermine America. Trump may not have realized it, but when he warned about a "Deep State" - a supposed cabal of bureaucrats that secretly controls U.S. policy - he was repeating a longtime Birch talking point.

A savvy reality TV star, Trump capitalized on a conservative political landscape that had been shaped by decades of right-wing talk radio, fears about America's seismic cultural shifts and the explosive online spread of misinformation.

While the Birch Society echoes in that mix, tracing those echoes is impossible. It's hard to draw neat historical lines in American politics. Was the Society a prime mover, or a bit player? In a nation fragmented by social media and offshoot groups by the dozens, there's just no way to be sure. What is certain, though, is this:

"The conspiratorial fringe is now the conspiratorial mainstream," says Paul Matzko, a historian and research fellow at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute. "Right-wing conspiracism has simply outgrown the John Birch Society." • • •

Their beliefs skip along the surface of the truth, with facts and rumors and outright fantasies banging together into a complex mythology. "The great conspiracy" is what Birch Society founder Robert Welch called it in "The Blue Book," the collection of his writings and speeches still treated as near-mystical scripture in the Society's corridors.

Welch, a wealthy candy company executive, formed the Society in the late 1950s, naming it for an American missionary and U.S. Army intelligence officer killed in 1945 by communist Chinese forces. Welch viewed Birch as the first casualty of the Cold War. Communist agents, he said, were everywhere in America.

Welch shot to prominence, and infamy, when he claimed that President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the hero general of World War II, was a "dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy." Also under Kremlin control, Welch asserted: the secretary of state, the head of the CIA, and Eisenhower's younger brother Milton.

Subtlety has never been a strong Birch tradition. Over the decades, the Birch conspiracy grew to encompass the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, public education, the United Nations, the civil rights movement, The Rockefeller Foundation, the space program, the COVID pandemic, the 2020 presidential election and climate-change activism. In short, things the Birchers don't like.

The plot's leaders - "insiders," in Society lexicon - range from railroad baron Cornelius Vanderbilt to former President George H.W. Bush and Bill Gates, whose vaccine advocacy is, they say, part of a plan to control the global population.

While his main focus was always communism, Welch eventually came to believe that the conspiracy's roots twisted far back into history, to the Illuminati, an 18th-century Bavarian secret society.

By the 1980s, the Society was well into its decline. Welch died in 1985 and the society's reins passed to a series of successors. There were internal revolts. While its aura has waned, it is still a force among some conservatives - its videos are popular in parts of right-wing America, and its offices include a sophisticated basement TV studio for internet news reports. Its members speak at right-wing conferences and work booths at the occasional county fair.

Today, the Society frames itself as almost conventional. Almost.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**

TIM SULLIVAN; AP National Writer, 'In small-town Wisconsin, looking for the roots of the modern American conspiracy theory', *West Hawaii Today* (online), 22 Jan 2024 <<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/196B76A69C2068B0>>

Largest deep-sea coral reef to date is mapped by scientists off the U.S. Atlantic coast

January 21, 2024 | Garden Island, The (Lihue, HI)

Author: Wyatt Haupt Jr. | Section: Hawaii News | 395 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Scientists have mapped the largest coral reef deep in the ocean, stretching hundreds of miles off the U.S. Atlantic coast.

While researchers have known since the 1960s that some coral were present off the Atlantic, the reef's size remained a mystery until new underwater mapping technology made it possible to construct 3D images of the ocean floor.

The largest yet known deep coral reef "has been right under our noses, waiting to be discovered," said Derek Sowers, an oceanographer at the nonprofit Ocean Exploration Trust.

Sowers and other scientists, including several at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, recently published maps of the reef in the journal *Geomatics*.

The reef extends for about 310 miles (499 kilometers) from Florida to South Carolina and at some points reaches 68 miles (109 kilometers) wide. The total area is nearly three times the size of Yellowstone National Park.

"It's eye-opening — it's breathtaking in scale," said Stuart Sandin, a marine biologist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, who was not involved in the study.

The reef was found at depths ranging from 655 feet to 3,280 feet (200 meters to 1,000 meters), where sunlight doesn't penetrate. Unlike tropical coral reefs, where photosynthesis is important for growth, coral this far down must filter food particles out of the water for energy.

Deep coral reefs provide habitat for sharks, swordfish, sea stars, octopus, shrimp and many other kinds of fish, the scientists said.

Tropical reefs are better known to scientists — and snorkelers — because they're more accessible. The world's largest tropical coral reef system, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, stretches for about 1,430 miles (2,301 kilometers).

Sowers said it's possible that larger deep-sea reefs will be discovered in the future since only about 25 percent of the world's ocean floor has been mapped in high-resolution. Only 50 percent of U.S. offshore waters have been mapped. Maps of the ocean floor are created using high-resolution sonar devices carried on ships.

Deep reefs cover more of the ocean floor than tropical reefs. Both kinds of habitat are susceptible to similar risks, including climate change and disturbance from oil and gas drilling, said Erik Cordes, a marine biologist at Temple University and co-author of the new study.

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Red Sea shipping attacks have impacts in Pacific

January 12, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Author: Kevin Knodell | Section: Hawaii News | 1250 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Ongoing attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea by Houthi militants from Yemen are causing ripples here in the Pacific.

The violence has prompted most major shipping companies to divert vessels from traveling through the Suez Canal, forcing them to take much longer routes around the South African Cape of Good Hope. It's causing massive delays and rising costs, and analysts warn that if the shipping disruption continues long term, it could contribute to severe global inflation.

Akhil Ramesh, a senior researcher at the Honolulu-based Pacific Forum, which studies the intersection of economic, trade and national security policy in the Indo-Pacific, said that "the issue in the Red Sea affects countries that have any economic interests around the globe — so it affects all nations in the world."

Iranian-backed Houthi militants had been periodically attacking merchant vessels passing through the Red Sea through much of 2023, but upped the ante Nov. 19 when a group of fighters flew and landed a helicopter on the Galaxy Leader, a Japanese-operated cargo ship with links to an Israeli company, and seized it.

The group said the hijacking was to show solidarity with Palestinians as Israel continues to wage a bloody offensive in Gaza that has leveled entire neighborhoods in retaliation for the Oct. 7 massacres in Israel by the militant group Hamas. The Houthis pledged to attack any ship they believe is traveling to or from Israel.

But since then the group has attacked ships that don't have clear ties to Israel. Since seizing the Galaxy Leader, Houthi militants have attacked commercial ships at least 23 times — including strikes by drones and ballistic missiles.

On Wednesday the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution calling for an immediate end to the attacks. On Thursday the U.S. and British militaries launched strikes on several Houthi-controlled sites in Yemen as tensions continued to escalate.

Before the recent crisis about 30% of global container traffic and more than 1 million barrels of crude oil made their way through the Suez Canal per day, according to data from the global freight booking platform Freightos Group. Maritime consultancy company Drewry's World Container Index showed global shipping rates jumping 61% over the first week of 2024, and attributed the spike to the Red Sea attacks.

"Anywhere in the world, if there's a disruption in the shipping lanes, it will affect the prices of your everyday goods — especially if it affects the price of crude," said Ramesh. "If the overall larger market is affected, at the end of the day, your products on the shelf are affected."

Countries across the Pacific have been showing increasing concern as merchant ships and workers from the region find themselves in the cross-fire. Last week Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand were among the Pacific countries that joined the United States in making a joint statement calling for an end to the attacks, charging that the Houthis are "jeopardizing the movement of critical food, fuel, and humanitarian assistance throughout the world."

While the violence in the Red Sea is causing economic anxiety across the globe, some maritime industry companies in the Pacific potentially stand to benefit.

In an article published Saturday in the shipping trade publication Freight Waves, industry analyst Zach Strickland wrote that "disproportionate shipping rate increases resulting from the Red Sea attacks further incentivize shippers to bring freight into the U.S. West Coast from Asia, as a pandemic-era pattern of shipping to Eastern ports continues to unwind."

But that doesn't necessarily mean any relief for Hawaii consumers buying goods coming into Hawaii's ports.

Ramesh explained that "you will still be affected because price of crude oils will be up in the market, which will shoot up the price of commodities that Hawaii imports ... because whoever is shipping it in, whether it's coming from California or Washington state, (prices are) still going to be up."

Armed conflicts around the globe have in recent years made supply chains prone to disruption — and Hawaii has frequently had to adapt to those disruptions.

In 2019 the majority of imported crude oil to Hawaii came from Libya (57%), followed by Russia (34%). The Libyan oil made its way to Hawaii in tankers traveling through the Suez Canal, into the Red Sea, across the Indian Ocean and through the South China Sea before finally docking in Hawaii. But in 2020, Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar seized oil fields in the country with the help of Russian Wagner Group mercenaries, disrupting global markets.

That year Libya provided only 16% of Hawaii's oil, while Russia remained at 34%, becoming Hawaii's top overall source for 2020. The disruption forced Par Pacific — which owns Hawaii's only oil refinery — to turn to other sources, including the war-torn Republic of Congo and others, to make up the difference for Hawaii's needs.

In March 2022 Par Pacific announced it would stop importing Russian oil after the Kremlin launched its invasion of western Ukraine. In the days after, President Joe Biden signed an executive order banning Russian energy imports, and Hawaiian Electric — which relies largely on petroleum-powered generators — announced that due to rising oil prices and Russia sanctions, residential customers would see price hikes.

But Par Pacific says it doesn't anticipate that the current crisis will affect its ability to get oil.

"We do not anticipate this will have any impact on our crude supply for Hawaii; however, we are continuing to closely monitor the situation," said Par Pacific spokesman Marc Inouye. "It's important to note we receive our crude oil from a number of geographical locations throughout the globe, and this diversity helps to support energy assurance for our islands."

Nevertheless, the price of oil is going up worldwide amid the attacks. Rakesh said that in particular when it comes to oil imports, the Red Sea crisis could add fuel to the ongoing debate over how to make Hawaii more self-sufficient. Hawaii has been one of the country's most petroleum-dependent states and is trying to diversify its power grid.

Hawaii is also more dependent on foreign oil sources than other states, as few U.S.-flagged oil tankers service routes that transport American oil to Hawaii and other Pacific island territories. And under the federal Jones Act, foreign-flagged ships cannot participate in interstate trade between American ports, meaning they cannot legally pick up oil from the mainland and deliver it to Hawaii.

In 2014 a state task force predicted that "if access to foreign sources of petroleum products is reduced (e.g., due to Chinese growth, Korean peninsula instability, Asian natural disasters impacting supply sources), Hawaii may need to rely on a significant amount of domestic supply and be exposed to higher freight costs. These costs will directly impact consumers."

In 2015 Hawaii became the first state to pledge to work toward powering the state with 100% renewable energy by 2045 both to fight climate change and make the islands more self-sufficient. But that has come with challenges of its own.

Planned solar farm and battery storage projects have faced delays or cancellation, and some officials have warned

about possible electricity shortages occurring in the wake of decommissioning a large coal-fired power plant with those projects still not complete.

Rolling blackouts that affected thousands of households across Oahu on Monday have been blamed in part on stormy weather reducing the amount of solar energy being generated and stored in battery systems for release during the peak evening use period, as well as slowed wind power generation during Monday evening and some reduced generation by the city's HPOWER garbage-to-energy plant, according to Hawaiian Electric.

Star-Advertiser staff writer Andrew Gomes contributed to this report.

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Native Hawaiian salt makers combat climate change and pollution to protect a sacred tradition

January 6, 2024 | Garden Island, The (Lihue, HI)

Author: Wyatt Haupt Jr. | Section: Hawaii News | 1280 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

HANAPEPE, Hawai'i — On a warm summer afternoon, Tina Taniguchi was on her hands and knees scraping dirt off an oblong depression in the ground. Thick brown hair peeked out from her coconut leaf hat. Splotches of mud stuck to her T-shirt and speckled her smiling face.

Taniguchi smiles a lot when she's working in her corner of the Hanapepe salt patch on the westside of Kaua'i — a terracotta plot of land about the size of a football field — dappled with elliptical pools of brine, crystallizing in clay beds.

"It's hard work, but for me it's also play," Taniguchi said, adding with a laugh, "I play in the mud all day."

Taniguchi's family is one of 22 who over generations have dedicated themselves to the cultural and spiritual practice of "pa'akai," the Hawaiian word for salt. This is one of the last remaining salt patches in Hawai'i. Its sacred salt can be traded or given away, but must never be sold. Hawaiians use it in cooking, healing, rituals and as protection.

Over the past decade, this tract has been under constant threat due to development, pollution from a neighboring airfield, sand erosion from vehicle traffic and littering by visitors to the adjacent beach.

In addition, climate change threatens to obliterate the practice with rising sea levels and modified weather patterns. Last year, the salt-making season lasted barely three months from July to September 2023 because of above-average rainfall. During a good year, work typically begins in May and ends in November.

Taniguchi drives about an hour to get here. For her, it's church and play rolled into one — the time she forges a spiritual connection to the land.

"This would be a religious practice of mine for sure," Taniguchi said. "My dad raised us saying that these mountains are his church, and the ocean is where you get cleansed."

Malia Nobrega-Olivera's grandfather was instrumental in forming the group of salt-making families called Hui Hana Paakai. She is also an educator and activist who leads efforts to preserve this centuries-old tradition.

The organization's goal, she said, is to speak with a collective voice when communicating with the landowner, the state of Hawai'i, whenever issues arise. Nobrega-Olivera said the salt patch is part of lands taken away from Native Hawaiians after the U.S.-backed overthrow of Hawai'i's monarchy in 1893.

"Regardless of what a piece of paper might say, we are stewards of the area and this land is our 'kupuna' (elder)," she said.

Nobrega-Olivera looks fondly at black-and-white photos of her grandparents, uncles and aunts from about five decades ago, standing near hillocks of shimmering salt. Back then, they would give away 5-gallon buckets. Today, they hand out salt in sandwich bags.

Trading salt for other items continues to this day, she said, adding that her late father once traded salt with a man who was selling piglets on Craigslist.

Born from the need to preserve fish and other meats, the process of turning sea water into salt can be slow and

grueling. The season begins once rain stops and waters recede, exposing the salt beds.

Ocean water travels underground and enters the wells. Each family has their own well, known as a "puna." As water enters the well, so do tiny, red brine shrimp, giving Hanapepe salt its unique sweetness, said Nobrega-Olivera.

Eventually, water from the wells is moved into the salt beds, which have been cleaned and lined with rich black clay. There, layers of salt crystals form. Typically, the top layer, which is the whitest, is used as table salt. The middle layer, pinkish, is used in cooking while the bottom layer, with a deep red hue, is used in blessings and rituals.

After the Maui fires in August that claimed 100 lives, spiritual practitioners there specifically requested white Hanapepe salt from Nobrega-Olivera to bless and "calm" the traumatized island, particularly areas that housed makeshift morgues. The salt makers continue to send their salt to survivors who are rebuilding their lives, so they can "make their food delicious and bring some of that joy into their lives," she said.

Nobrega-Olivera believes Hanapepe salt has the power to ward off bad energy.

"When I walk into a difficult meeting, I put a salt crystal on my tongue as a reminder to watch my words."

Many of the salt-making families are Christian. Nobrega-Olivera said reconciling their Christian faith with their spirituality as Native Hawaiians can be challenging, but it happens organically.

"There are some gatherings where we may honor our deities," she said. "Other occasions may call for a Christian prayer in Hawaiian or English, or both. You do what feels right for that space."

Nobrega-Olivera believes Western science and Indigenous knowledge can combine to combat the effects of climate change and save the salt patch. The steps include building up the wells' edges so when sea levels rise, the water won't inundate the area. Another important step: preventing sand dune erosion from vehicle traffic to the beach, which causes the waves to crest and flood the patch.

"Some ask us why we can't move this practice to a different location," she said. "That's impossible because our cultural practice is particular to this land. There are elements here that make this place special for making this type of salt. You cannot find that anywhere else."

Those working on the salt patches enter with reverence. Nobrega-Olivera said menstruating women typically do not come and red clothes are avoided.

Kanani Santos said he removes his shoes before entering because he likes to "be connected to the ground." He enjoys walking there at sunset, when the brick-red patch of land appears bathed in gold and the salt crystals sparkle like magic dust.

"I say a little prayer, ask for blessings to have a good harvest, to have a quiet soul and to embrace the moment," he said.

Kurt Kualii'i, a chef whose family has made salt for 10 generations, choked up when speaking about this as his "kuleana," which means responsibility.

"I get moments of silence here like church," he said. "I believe in akua (god), a higher power. This is where I come to connect with that higher power, teach the children and be with family. There's good energy here."

Even when rain disrupts an entire day's work, Kualii'i says he knows it's "God telling us it's not time yet, to slow down." The best part of salt making is giving it all away, he said.

"Sharing is Hawaiian. This is something you make with your hands. I may not be the best at everything, but I can

make Hawaiian salt," he said.

Kane Turalde has been coming to the salt patch since he was 7 years old. He is 68 now, a Native Hawaiian educator and canoe-racing coach. He has protested in the past to block luxury homes and other development near the salt patch, which he says would have created more traffic and pollution.

"I always come here in the spirit of akua," he said. "Before I leave home, I call my ancestors here so when I arrive, they are here."

In his family's home, Turalde's grandmother kept a bowl of salt by the door. Everyone would take a pinch and say a prayer before going out, for protection, he said.

With the resurgence of Hawaiian culture and language on the islands, Nobrega-Olivera said she now thinks about how to transmit this knowledge to younger generations.

One way she honors the Hanapepe salt patch is by composing "mele," or Hawaiian songs and chants. She recently taught some school children one of those chants whose chorus is "aloha 'aina," which means "love of the land." Her eyes welled up as she saw their enthusiasm to learn the mele.

"Aloha 'aina captures our philosophy, the reason we do this," Nobrega-Olivera said. "You take care of the land, and the land takes care of you."

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Plant of the month for January 2024: elephant bush

January 6, 2024 | West Hawaii Today (Kailua-Kona, HI)

Author: Diana Duff Special to West Hawaii Today | 1303 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

On a recent visit to a friend in Kohala Ranch, we talked about installing some fire-resistant plant species. A friend of hers had recommended elephant bush (*Portulacaria afra*), known in the Afrikaans language as spekboom in its native South Africa. Her friend, Bernard Moret, had written about his experience with this plant for the Kohala Ranch Report and gave me permission use his story here.

A recent fire in Kohala Ranch burned all the ground covers near his house but it was stopped by the elephant bush.

Bernard reported, "(Elephant bush) seems to be under-recognized in Hawaii as a fire-resistant plant; in South Africa, California and Arizona (it) has been used to populate firebreaks."

I did some additional research and will share what I learned about this plant. For those in fire-prone areas, it is an excellent plant to consider. Elephant bush would also make an interesting addition to a xeriscape garden either potted or in the ground. In a bright location, it can also be grown indoors.

Elephant bush is a succulent shrub in the Didiereaceae family and the Portulacaceae genus. Due to its similar appearance, it is sometimes confused with jade plant (*Crassula ovata*) but it is not botanically related. It has a more compact growth habit with smaller, rounder leaves and is somewhat hardier than jade plants. It shares more similarities with portulaca plants, thus sharing the same botanical family as moss rose and other portulaca species.

As the name "elephant bush" or "elephant food" suggests, this plant is known to be eaten by elephants as well as other large herbivores including tortoises and the black rhinoceros. Although it is not the primary food source for these animals, it is a significant part of their diet. During periods of drought, elephant bush is often used to feed livestock. It serves as a supplemental source of water in addition to its nutritional benefits.

People also eat this plant. In South Africa it is often used to add a sour flavor to salads, soups or stews. The crispy foliage is slightly tart and contains small amounts of malic acid.

Many features make elephant bush a good firebreak. It is very heat resistant and can withstand the extreme heat of a fire with only slight withering. Also, its small succulent leaves do not burn easily. The succulent woody stems also add to its resistance to fire.

Other features make this plant a good choice for any dry area. Elephant bush is both drought and wind tolerant. It can also withstand the heat and sun of desert conditions once established and has several varieties both prostrate and upright.

Growth habits of the elephant plant range from a low-growing ground cover to a sprawling tree form that can grow over 10 feet tall in ideal growing conditions. Growing in a hot sunny location in soil that drains well, gets sufficient water and adequate fertilization the plant can grow tall and may produce flowers over time.

Elephant bush does well in pots. Some varieties work well in a hanging basket where its trailing stems will cascade down gracefully. Indoors it is a low-maintenance house plant and it is a good specimen to use for bonsai.

Several varieties of elephant bush or spekboom exist. Some occur naturally while others have been bred in cultivation. A good ground cover variety that is resistant to burning is prostrata. A compact upright known as aurea has leaves that turn bright yellow in the sun, giving it the name "yellow rainbow." Variegata has cream-colored leaves and is well suited to covering slopes or terraces. Cork bark is a variety with a rough stem making it

especially prized for bonsai.

Elephant plant is a perennial with a soft woody stem that is reddish when young. and that has small fleshy green leaves that are round and glossy. The leaves grow off the young stems as well as off the older, stiff, tapering branches. The irregularly-arranged branches may need some pruning to prevent them from growing into a thicket. Older, heavy branches can be brittle and may occasionally break off.

Fallen branches often root where they fall, starting new plants. Since flowering and fruiting is rare among elephant plants, the best propagation technique is from cuttings. Remove a stem from the main plant and let it dry and callous for a few days. Once this has occurred, place it on soil that drains well and only water it when the soil is dry. Keep the cutting in a shady spot and it should root in four to six weeks.

Once the plant has rooted and is putting out new leaves, you can plant it in a spot that gets at least six hours of sun a day in soil with good drainage. Water it only when the top of the soil is completely dry. The plant needs little attention. You can fertilize lightly every few months to encourage vigorous growth and flowering.

Pruning is only needed to control the plant's size and spread.

Elephant plant is not usually attacked by pests. Although it is subject to root rot, this can be prevented by allowing the soil to dry out periodically and never allowing the plant to sit in wet soil.

Flowering is rare in elephant bush in cultivation. Fertilizing can encourage flowering over time. Small white or pink star-shaped blossoms may appear in clusters at the end of succulent stems when the plant is healthy and mature. If the flowers are pollinated, they will produce tiny berry-like dry fruit that contains a single seed. If seeds appear, you may try getting them to germinate but growing new plants from cuttings is far more reliable.

In addition to being an interesting, edible and fire-break plant, *Portulacaria afra* is often used as a "carbon sponge." This means it is capable of absorbing high levels of carbon from the air. Carbon absorption and sequestering is a very attractive attribute as we seek to deal with climate change

Call around to find sources of *Portulacaria afra*. Some nurseries in and around Hilo may carry the plant. Just be sure you get the actual elephant plant and not a different portulaca or a jade plant. Neither of these have the same fire-resistant quality.

Gardening Events

Saturdays:

- "Work Day at Amy Greenwell Garden" from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Meet at the Garden Visitor Center across from the Manago Hotel in Captain Cook. Come with a mask and prepared to practice social distancing. Volunteers can help with garden maintenance and are invited to bring a brown bag lunch. Water and snacks provided. Visit the website www.amygreenwell.garden/get-involved/volunteer-1/ and sign up for the weekly email for more information on work days.

Farmer Direct Markets

(Check websites for the latest hours and online markets)

Wednesday:

- "Ho'oulu Farmers Market" 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Sheraton Kona Resort & Spa at Keauhou Bay

Saturday:

- "Keauhou Farmers Market" 8 a.m. to 12 noon at Keauhou Shopping Center. Information on their online market: keauhoufarmersmarket.com/onlinemarket

- "Kamuela Farmer's Market" 7:30 a.m. to 12 noon at Pukalani Stables

- "Waimea Town Market" 7:30 a.m. to noon at the Parker School in central Waimea

- "Waimea Homestead Farmers Market" from 7:30 a.m. to 12 noon at the Waimea middle and elementary school playground

Sunday:

- "Pure Kona Green Market" 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Amy Greenwell Garden in Captain Cook

- "Hamakua Harvest" 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Hwy 19 and Mamane Street in Honokaa

Plant Advice Lines

Anytime: konamg@hawaii.edu

Tuesdays and Thursdays: 9 a.m. to noon at UH-CES in Kainaliu - (808) 322-4893 or walk in

Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays: 9 a.m. to 12 noon at UH-CES at Komohana in Hilo - (808) 981-5199 or himga@hawaii.edu

Diana Duff is a plant adviser, educator and consultant living part time in Kailua-Kona.

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Hydrogen isn't clean if it adds to climate pollution. Biden's rules are a good start

January 5, 2024 | Hawaii Tribune-Herald (Hilo, HI)

Section: , 521 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

The Inflation Reduction Act, signed by President Joe Biden more than a year ago, is a game-changing law that invests hundreds of billions of dollars to fight climate change and boost renewable energy.

It includes lucrative tax credits aimed at making it cheaper to produce clean hydrogen, which are expected to funnel more than \$100 billion in taxpayer funds toward this nascent technology. As a fuel that releases only water vapor when burned, hydrogen is a promising tool to slash emissions from industries that will be harder to clean up through electrification, such as steel, cement, aviation and long-distance trucking.

But the climate benefits of hydrogen evaporate if they are made with fossil fuels. That's why it's important that federal officials ensure the most valuable incentives only support truly "green" hydrogen projects that do not add to carbon emissions. And it's why it was something of a relief to see the Biden administration release unexpectedly stringent rules last month requiring that hydrogen projects meet rigorous life-cycle emissions standards to qualify for the most generous tax credits.

It's much cheaper to produce hydrogen with methane, a highly polluting fossil fuel, than with electricity. These subsidies are designed to upend those economics by making hydrogen produced with renewable energy cost-competitive.

Clean hydrogen is produced by splitting water molecules using massive amounts of electricity. These power-hungry projects can hog clean energy from other users and actually drive up consumption of fossil fuels.

To avoid this, environmentalists pushed to have hydrogen projects meet strict requirements to be eligible for the most generous tax credits of \$3 per kilogram of "clean" hydrogen - including being powered by additional sources of zero-emissions electricity, such as wind and solar; being generated at the same time of day as the water-splitting equipment is operating; and being deliverable within the same region where the hydrogen is produced.

The Treasury Department standards released last month largely adhere to these principles, to the delight of environmentalists and the consternation of business groups, which pushed for laxer requirements, and fossil-fuel-friendly politicians like West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin III.

California has much at stake because the Biden administration selected the state as one of seven regional "clean hydrogen hubs" across the country that will receive \$7 billion in federal infrastructure funding. So it's disappointing that the Alliance for Renewable Clean Hydrogen Energy Systems, the state-led public-private consortium behind California's hydrogen hub plan, was among the groups advocating against the tighter standards on the grounds that they would be too onerous and put clean hydrogen at a disadvantage compared with other technologies.

Being strict about what counts as green and clean is the right thing to do for the climate, as is reserving the greatest incentives to hydrogen production that actually reduces planet-warming emissions. Consumer advocates also have appropriately emphasized that such guidelines are needed to protect regular people from rising electricity rates that could result from hydrogen projects diverting power from existing renewable energy sources.

State and federal leaders should monitor how these incentives are helping to grow a sustainable industry. We can't afford to squander tens of billions of federal climate funding on projects with questionable environmental effects.-
Los Angeles Times/TNS

- **Citation (aglc Style)**

'Hydrogen isn't clean if it adds to climate pollution. Biden's rules are a good start', *Hawaii Tribune-Herald* (online), 5 Jan 2024
<<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/1965E95138E51428>>

Nation & world news - at a glance - for Wednesday, December 3, 2024

January 3, 2024 | West Hawaii Today (Kailua-Kona, HI)

Author: wire sources | 577 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Menendez faces a new accusation: Aiding the Qatari government

Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J. - already accused of using his political influence to benefit Egypt - was newly charged Tuesday with using his power to help the government of Qatar. Federal prosecutors in New York City said Menendez exploited his Senate office to aid a developer in securing financial backing from an investment fund run by a Qatari sheikh in exchange for lucrative bribes. The alleged payoffs included cash, gold bars, Formula One tickets for a relative and an offer of a designer watch. The updated indictment broadens the government's allegations against Menendez, 70, who was head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the time.

Epstein documents naming prominent figures expected to be released soon

Court documents related to disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein are expected to be released soon with many names that were previously redacted, and prominent figures on the right are holding up the impending disclosures as evidence of wrongdoing by Democrats despite a lack of concrete information about what they will show. A longtime friend of politicians, executives and royalty, Epstein was accused of bringing girls as young as 14 to his homes and paying them for sex acts. He died by suicide in jail before he could stand trial on federal sex-trafficking charges, but his associate Ghislaine Maxwell was convicted of conspiring with him and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Maersk says its vessels will avoid the Red Sea

after another

Houthi attack

Maersk, the Danish shipping giant, said Tuesday that its vessels were going to avoid the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden after one of its ships was attacked by the Houthi militia. The Maersk Hangzhou, a container ship, was hit by a missile in the Red Sea on Dec. 30 and then attacked by Houthi small boats on Dec. 31, according to the Pentagon. The U.S. Navy struck back, sinking three boats. Maersk said it was stopping shipments through the Red Sea "until further notice." Vessels must pass through the Red Sea to make northward passage through the Suez Canal, which handles about 12% of world trade.

Denmark's

king-to-be: A modern, climate-friendly monarch

Like most Britons, many Danes have known only one queen throughout their lifetime - one who was extremely popular and known for her sense of responsibility, propriety and commitment to her duties. On Sunday, Danish Queen Margrethe said she would step down this month. That paves the way for her son Prince Frederik, 55, to ascend to the throne. Like King Charles III of Britain, who became king after the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, Frederik is part of a younger generation of royals who have had their lives relentlessly documented in the media and who have embraced contemporary stances, chiefly the fight against climate change.

A port deal has

the Horn of Africa

on edge

The Ethiopian government has signed a preliminary agreement with Somaliland, a self-declared breakaway republic in northwestern Somalia, granting Ethiopia commercial and military access to the territory's gateway to the Red Sea - a port deal that threatens to inflame tensions in the tumultuous Horn of Africa region. In a memorandum of understanding, the leader of Somaliland, Muse Bihi Abdi, said he would lease more than 12 miles of sea access for 50 years to the Ethiopian navy. In return, Ethiopia would formally recognize Somaliland as an independent nation. The pact has rattled the Horn of Africa, which is encumbered by civil war, political wrangling and widespread humanitarian crises.

By wire sources

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**

wire sources, 'Nation & world news - at a glance - for Wednesday, December 3, 2024', *West Hawaii Today* (online), 3 Jan 2024
〈<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/19653977F5A52B68>〉

Bezos' \$100M pledge to aid Maui after wildfires can't be traced

January 20, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Section: Hawaii News | 828 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Jeff Bezos has a habit of issuing splashy philanthropic promises while offering few details. The latest: a \$100 million pledge to help rebuild Maui after August's devastating wildfires.

Bezos and fiancée Lauren Sanchez have given \$15.5 million over the past five months through the Bezos Maui Fund, according to a spokesperson for the billionaire. But he declined to name the recipients — and local officials and nonprofits on Hawaii's second-biggest island are puzzled at where the money might have gone.

This isn't the first time Bezos has offered few specifics on his philanthropy. There was the \$10 billion climate pledge, nine-figure gifts to famous friends and a vague promise to give away the majority of his wealth — all of which came with little more than a dollar figure and subject area, if that.

While other billionaires are also secretive with their giving, Bezos, the world's second-richest person, stands out in part because his ex-wife, MacKenzie Scott, has redefined what it means to be an ultrarich philanthropist. Scott, 53, has donated more than \$16.5 billion since their 2019 divorce, and releases a list of recipients on her website, including more than 360 organizations that received money in the past year.

Bezos, 60, for his part, has donated more than \$3 billion over that period. But that's far off of the billions more he's promised to give away with few immediate details.

'Maximum publicity'

The practice offers the Amazon.com Inc. founder "maximum publicity with minimum accountability," said Benjamin Soskis, a senior research associate at the Urban Institute's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy.

While donors aren't legally required to say where the money is going unless gifts have been made from a tax-exempt organization, "Bezos has gained the benefits of public attention, and in exchange he needs to provide more information," Soskis said.

Bezos' spokesperson said in an email that the remaining \$84.5 million pledged to help Maui "will be distributed in the coming years as the continuing needs reveal themselves."

Keeping it vague has been a familiar pattern for Bezos in recent years. In 2020 he pledged \$10 billion to battle climate change, though he gave almost no information on how he'd dole out that enormous amount of money or over what period of time. It took nine more months to make the first gifts. Since then the Bezos Earth Fund has granted \$1.84 billion, according to its website.

A year later he launched the Courage & Civility Award, which so far has given \$100 million grants to Van Jones, Jose Andres and Dolly Parton to distribute to other nonprofit organizations. Bezos boasted at the time that the annual award requires little accountability of its recipients.

"No bureaucracy, no committees, they just do what they want," Bezos told a crowd gathered in Van Horn, Texas, just after he went into suborbital space for the first time.

Bezos has been equally hazy about future giving. He told CNN in 2022 that he planned to give away the majority of his then-\$124 billion fortune during his lifetime, without specifying potential recipients or a timetable. He's since added more than \$52 billion to his net worth, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index.

Nobody knows

Bezos and Sanchez's pledge was the splashiest commitment to help Maui after fires broke out across the northwestern part of the island, killing roughly 100 people and leaving thousands more homeless. Sanchez said in an Aug. 11 Instagram post that the money will "help Maui get back on its feet now and over the coming years."

But as months have passed, it's unclear when and where the promised money has been distributed.

"Nobody's heard anything at all," said Angus McKelvey, the state senator representing West Maui, adding that he's disappointed in the lack of information and collaboration. "Had they simply consulted with the community and myself and other representatives, we would've told them, 'Take your money and put it over here.'"

Trisha Kehaulani Watson, vice president of the Native Hawaiian nonprofit 'Aina Momona, said it hasn't gotten any of the money, and she was unaware of anyone in her network of nonprofits who has.

A half-dozen other nonprofits working on the island after the fire, including Maui United Way and the People's Fund of Maui, also said they haven't received funds from Bezos and Sanchez.

Some speculated the money went to the Hawai'i Community Foundation, which has raised more than \$177 million for its Maui Strong Fund. A representative for the group said they "don't have any information" on the destination of Bezos' pledge, though it did receive a \$2 million donation in September from the foundation started by Bezos' parents.

Bezos and Sanchez, who own an estate on Maui's La Perouse Bay, aren't the only rich residents who've promised to chip in.

Oprah Winfrey and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson started the People's Fund of Maui in August with initial contributions of \$5 million each. The fund has since distributed about \$40 million directly to more than 8,100 people. Scott also donated \$5 million to the Hawai'i Community Foundation.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**

'Bezos' \$100M pledge to aid Maui after wildfires can't be traced', *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* (online), 20 Jan 2024
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Bezos promised \$100 million after Maui wildfire but no one knows where it's going

January 19, 2024 | Hawaii Tribune-Herald (Hilo, HI)

Author: SOPHIE ALEXANDER Bloomberg News/TNS 869 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Jeff Bezos has a habit of issuing splashy philanthropic promises while offering few details. The latest: a \$100 million pledge to help rebuild Maui after August's devastating wildfires. Bezos and fiancée Lauren Sanchez have given \$15.5 million over the past five months through the Bezos Maui Fund, according to a spokesperson for the billionaire. But he declined to name the recipients - and local officials and nonprofits on Hawaii's second-biggest island are puzzled at where the money might have gone.

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While other billionaires are also secretive with their giving, Bezos, the world's second-richest person, stands out in part because his ex-wife, MacKenzie Scott, has redefined what it means to be an ultra-rich philanthropist. Scott, 53, has donated more than \$16.5 billion since their 2019 divorce, and releases a list of recipients on her website, including more than 360 organizations that received money in the past year.

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NOBODY KNOWS

Bezos' and Sanchez's pledge was the splashiest commitment to help Maui after fires broke out across the northwest part of the island, killing roughly 100 people and leaving thousands more homeless. Sanchez said in an Aug. 11 Instagram post that the money will "help Maui get back on its feet now and over the coming years."

But as months have passed, it's unclear when and where the promised money has been distributed. "Nobody's heard anything at all," said Angus McKelvey, the state senator representing West Maui, adding that he's disappointed in the lack of information and collaboration. "Had they simply consulted with the community and myself and other representatives, we would've told them, 'Take your money and put it over here.'"

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A half-dozen other nonprofits working on the island after the fire, including the Maui United Way and the People's Fund of Maui, also said they haven't received funds from Bezos and Sanchez. Some speculated the money went to the Hawaii Community Foundation, which has raised more than \$177 million for its Maui Strong Fund. A representative for the group said they "don't have any information" on the destination of Bezos's pledge, though they did receive a \$2 million donation in September from the foundation started by Bezos' parents.

Bezos and Sanchez, who own an estate on Maui's La Perouse Bay, aren't the only rich residents who've promised to chip in. Oprah Winfrey and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson started the People's Fund of Maui in August with initial contributions of \$5 million each. The fund has since distributed about \$40 million directly to more than 8,100 people. Scott also donated \$5 million to the Hawaii Community Foundation.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**

SOPHIE ALEXANDER; Bloomberg News/TNS, 'Bezos promised \$100 million after Maui wildfire but no one knows where it's going', *Hawaii Tribune-Herald* (online), 19 Jan 2024 <<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/196A8773C80BC4C8>>

Groups call for investigation of Laysan albatross's death on North Shore

January 19, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)
Author: Nina Wu | Section: Hawaii News | 570 Words
[OpenURL Link](#)

Several environmental groups are calling for a federal investigation into the killing of a Laysan albatross on Oahu's North Shore.

The female Laysan albatross, known as Ho'okipa, was found in December entangled in an iron fence, unable to return to the egg it had been incubating.

Maxx Phillips, Hawaii director and attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, said a post-mortem exam found that the bird had died of blunt-force trauma, with bleeding in the brain typical for birds hit on the head by large objects.

The Laysan albatross, or moli, is a seabird indigenous to Hawaii. It is not listed as endangered, but is protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, enforced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Center for Biological Diversity, along with the Ko'olau Waialua Alliance, Malama Marconi Coalition and the Conservation Council for Hawai'i, are calling on USFWS to investigate the Dec. 2 death as a likely violation of the act and to take full enforcement action such as levying fines.

"When I first heard of this from the center, my heart dropped because we've been here before," said Phillips. "There's more that needs to be done so that these types of atrocious, cruel acts are adequately punished. The state needs to bring stringent punishments under Hawaii statutes. The USFWS needs to enforce the Migratory Bird Treaty."

She added that the "grotesque killing" could have been prevented and that state and federal agencies should take enforcement action and send a clear message that cruelty will not be tolerated.

Fish and Wildlife officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday.

Center for Biological Diversity officials also expressed concerned about the impact of the iron fence on the Marconi Condominiums property on the North Shore. They say the fence was built without required special management area permits.

Wildlife advocates say the Marconi Development is associated with a "long list of violations that negatively affected protected species" and that these have resulted in the previous injuries and deaths of several migratory birds.

"For more than 15 years the community has watched with great sadness as the negative impacts of unpermitted habitat clearing and construction on the historic Marconi property have increased," Lynell DaMate of the Ko'olau Waialua Alliance said in a statement. "Nesting turtles, Laysan albatross, monk seals, yellow-faced bees, native plants and the coast itself have federal, state and local laws in place to protect them. In addition to numerous houses and roads, six huge warehouses now stand on dozens of acres where trees were burned and wetlands filled without regard for biological, cultural or historical resources."

The groups also called on the Fish and Wildlife Service to finalize rules it promised over two years ago that would provide guidelines for developers. These rules, they said, might have prevented fence construction where albatrosses are

nesting.

Human disturbance and conflict are among the primary threats to the seabirds, according to wildlife officials, along with introduced predators and climate change.

In 2015 the state Department of Land and Natural Resources found a number of dead or missing albatrosses and destroyed nests and eggs at Kaena Point Natural Area Reserve. Following investigations, it was determined that three former Punahou School students participated in the mass slaying.

"We're seeing history repeat itself a little bit," said Phillips. "It highlights even more the need for our state and federal agencies to step up to the plate and ensure these kinds of acts, that these bad actors, are punished for something so

egregious."

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**

Nina Wu, 'Groups call for investigation of Laysan albatross's death on North Shore', *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* (online), 19 Jan 2024
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Letter: Stop with trendy 'green' energy; bring back coal

January 19, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Section: Editorial | 267 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Hawaiian Electric (HECO) sent us into the Dark Ages with its rolling blackouts. And it intends to send us back further into a Third World Stone Age to appease woke green politics set on demonizing the very fossil fuels that invited humanity to the party called prosperity.

You cannot rely on unreliable hip/new renewable energy to provide the energy return of real boss adult energy fuels. Europe could've told us that, since they're drowning in hubris and trying to warn us, to no avail.

We are finding out the hard way that the religion of climate change is turning out to be a false religion with real-time rolling consequences.

The zero-carbon agenda of the World Economic Forum will make people suffer for no reason other than an obedience to green propaganda.

Without energy we either burn or freeze — and definitely we starve. We're just lucky we're not in a poor country where these policies impact immediately.

We can blame Vladimir Putin for our energy woes if we want to. Or we can realize that it's HECO that took us off of energy-dense and affordable fuels before Ukraine was even a thing. Bring back sanity, bring back coal.

Todd C. Wetmore

Kaimuki

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'Letter: Stop with trendy 'green' energy; bring back coal', *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*(online), 19 Jan 2024

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Editorial: Fires, tourism, homes top issues

January 14, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Section: Editorial | 731 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

The Hawaii Legislature's session begins Wednesday, with an agenda packed full of pressing issues, led by recovery from the Maui fires and devastation of Lahaina. State House recommendations for the session focus on needs arising from the fire response, and the Senate has "emergency preparedness, recovery and resiliency" at the top of its legislative priority list.

The upcoming fiscal year's budget also prioritizes relief and recovery for West Maui. That means tough decisions will be necessary on spending in other areas, such as University of Hawaii infrastructure maintenance needs.

Spending on rental support for those displaced by the Lahaina fire will be necessary, along with funds to bolster emergency preparedness statewide. The House and Senate agree on a need to add funding and personnel for fighting wildfires, and for mitigating risks by eliminating dry overgrowth and addressing water allocation. Close scrutiny of the state's emergency management structure and effectiveness, as well as the governance of other departments with responsibility for oversight, will be crucial.

Spending on the state's burgeoning needs is dependent on the health of Hawaii's economy, and tourism is the single largest contributor. That makes the upcoming, inevitable debate over the future of the Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) a key aspect of the session. Held over from last session, House Bill 1375 proposes that the HTA be disbanded, with a state Office of Tourism and Destination Management formed to take over marketing and management. With HTA's CEO position open and Hawaii Lodging and Tourism Association CEO Mufi Hannemann newly appointed as board chair, the agency remains in transition; the Legislature's action will largely determine what happens next.

In July, HTA's board green-lit the creation of a new, co-equal branch for destination stewardship. It also inaugurated a quality assurance program, under the direction of HTA finance Vice President Isaac Choy, a respected former Hawaii tax director. Given these steps forward, and HTA's commitment to build legislative trust, the HTA should continue to lead tourism management and spending.

It's important to manage tourism so that it provides the benefits Hawaii expects from its success, including affordable workforce housing that serves industry employees, and preservation and protection of Hawaii's natural assets. The Legislature must match tourism spending with measurable targets in these areas to produce the necessary results.

Affordable housing, and access to educational and training opportunities providing the opportunity to earn a living wage, are statewide needs that deserve laser-focus in the coming session. Properly, there is general agreement that the state must press forward with expanded access to early childhood education, funding education and supporting housing for Hawaii's teachers.

The Senate has prioritized support for two additional housing development projects, each for 10,000 units, administered by the Hawaii Housing Finance and Development Corp. and Hawaii Community Development Authority. Moving forward with these projects is crucial.

Housing for the homeless must also be addressed, on all islands. A new willingness to expand housing into business and industrial zones, as with Iwilei and other transportation-oriented developments, may bring fresh approaches — but as always, the state must carefully link spending with targeted results.

It's ultimately important, too, that the state protect and conserve Hawaii's unique and fragile environment, turning

the tide on the state's status as endangered species frontrunner and preparing for inevitable effects of climate change. Ignoring these needs would be catastrophic, and here, too, any discussion of government programs and spending must be tied to environmental effects.

Legislators will again consider a "green fee" — a new visitor impact fee on tourists that's intended to offset the impact on state lands, and to help address climate change. This is an idea whose time has come. In order to fund maintenance of public lands, including conservation efforts, the Legislature should authorize forward movement on an impact fee this year.

Other initiatives that serve Hawaii residents and are affected by climate change include improving access to potable water, expanding alternative-energy infrastructure, such as new electric vehicle charging stations, and continued exploration of island-generated energy alternatives. Funds needed to eradicate or manage invasive species are small relative to the overall budget, but are of the utmost importance to the islands' environment.

To further the state's goals for self-sufficiency and reduced energy outlay, it's also crucial to reform the Agribusiness Development Corp., which so far has not produced a sufficient return on investment. More measurable progress is needed on the Senate's commitment to restore and preserve local agriculture, and with it, food security for Hawaii.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**

'Editorial: Fires, tourism, homes top issues', *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* (online), 14 Jan 2024

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UH signs deal to develop new satellite technology

January 17, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)
Author: Ian Bauer | Section: Hawaii News | 847 Words
[OpenURL Link](#)

Under a new agreement, the University of Hawaii at Manoa hopes to promote greater research and development of new satellite-based technologies to better study Earth from space.

That memorandum of understanding — signed Tuesday morning at UH President David Lassner's office — will see the state's largest public academic institution partner with Virginia-based group Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance to develop onboard sensors for Earth-orbiting satellites.

While MDAA's formal mission statement is to "make the world safer by advocating for the development of missile defense systems to defend the United States, its armed forces and its allies against missile threats," it's not a spy satellite program they're building, they state.

Instead, MDAA Chair and founder Riki Ellison said the agreement with UH aims to advance the gathering of peaceful, scientific knowledge rather than military

intelligence.

"Right now we've got a vast Pacific that's uncharted and unknown," Ellison

told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser.

The future program will involve students at UH's School of Ocean & Earth Science & Technology as well as the departments of engineering, physics and astronomy. Ellison said using satellites will allow investigating things ranging from terrestrial energy use to mass fish movements,

to other ocean-based

issues that directly affect Hawaii.

Michael Bruno, UH Manoa's provost, said "at its heart" the partnership will be a workforce development program to range from

undergraduate to graduate students and others.

"The way you go about developing a modern workforce in an area as sophisticated as space, in my view, you have to begin with a base of knowledge and research that can provide that technical expertise to young people," Bruno said.

The new UH program — expected to have about 25 students involved annually — could start this summer or fall.

The agreement with MDAA was "an outgrowth of a large university initiative in space sciences," he added.

"Our work with MDAA is going to be primarily about education, in particular the development and delivery of executive education programs aimed at professionals as well as advanced students in the broad industry that we have defined as space sciences," Bruno said. "These education programs will be designed to connect the leading-edge research at UH Manoa with student

instruction.

"Our goal will be to educate professionals and aspiring professionals about the latest understanding of astrophysics and space sensor technologies," he said. "The program will not be developing military technology."

Rather, satellite-based sensors could monitor what's going on in and around the Hawaiian Islands, he said.

"That could be anything from wildfires to the volcano erupting, to long-period things like climate change impacts," he added.

Under the three-year agreement, Bruno said the MOU "stipulates that specific activities under the agreement, such as executive educational programs, will be developed and implemented under separate agreements or contracts."

There is no payment included in this agreement.

"Any discussion of costs will wait until we get into the detailed planning of the programs," Bruno said.

According to Ellison, MDAA — which initiated similar space-based programs at the University of Arizona and University of Southern California that consider national security threats from above — will bring expertise in space technology, government and policy to advance learning here.

"And the other thing is that, being the center of the Pacific, to have our other Pacific nations send their students to (UH) is in the best interests for the security of our world and for keeping the status quo," Ellison said.

This agreement comes on the heels of related work to advance space technology in Hawaii.

Earlier this month, UH announced it had launched the space tech development center and student-training hub at its Hilo campus.

"The Space Sciences Initiative is expected to attract millions of dollars in funding, expand Hawaii's technology sector and create more high-paying jobs on Hawaii Island and across the state," a Jan. 7 news release states.

To launch that program, UH says it received \$2 million in state funds to start the initial design of the facility, which is currently estimated to cost about

\$30 million to \$40 million

to construct.

"UH students will receive valuable hands-on training at the center producing instruments for space-based missions and ground-based telescopes," the release states.

"Ground observatories, including those based in Hawaii, spend tens of millions of dollars on a recurring basis to upgrade equipment and build instrumentation.

"That engineering effort typically occurs outside of the state and the planned facility will be designed to bring a larger fraction of that activity to Hawaii," the release reads. "The additive manufacturing and precision machining capabilities of the center and its personnel will also be able to support the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and the other

Department of Defense

entities as well as aerospace and private sector partners."

Meanwhile, Lassner said the MDAA agreement will advance the university's academic mission.

"We have incredible capacity in this area," Lassner told the Star-Advertiser, noting the school has fostered astronomy-, geophysics- and space-related programs at UH for some time. "We have the Hawaii Space Flight Lab that's launching stuff, we have the (Hawaii) Space Grant Consortium — it's based here but it's statewide — and we have community college kids building payload, launching it and winning contests."

He added "collectively, what this represents to me is pulling these assets together ... (and) it's pretty obvious, so we just got to get going."

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**

Ian Bauer, 'UH signs deal to develop new satellite technology', *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* (online), 17 Jan 2024
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Column: Critical challenges loom, but human spirit strong

January 14, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Section: Editorial | 587 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Before this brand new year becomes obscured with more issues, there are at least three concerns, from my perspective, that require our moral resolve, our collective effort, our principled thinking and our sustained action: the extinction of all creation, our violent culture, and technological "progress."

The editorial staff of the Star-Advertiser deserves commendation for expressing views about all three!

First, in the Sunday "Insight" section of Dec. 31, two commentaries about the environment were published: "Climate justice includes carbon pricing" by Helen Cox, Matthew Geyer and Noel Morin; and "100% renewable for Oahu is bad law," by Clint Churchill and Ed MacNaughton. All of them are exceptional people and I know Churchill, Cox and MacNaughton through Punahou School connections. However, I'd say that Churchill and MacNaughton, while making valid arguments, are very wrong about their primary premise: that fossil fuels aren't the cause of climate change. The piece by Cox, Geyer and Morin deserves applause.

Because of the deniers and those becoming wealthy from carbon emissions, all creation on Earth is facing extinction. The tragic Maui wildfires appear to be a direct result of the extreme weather patterns caused by climate change. The world economy needs an alternative source for sustaining life, and we're running out of time.

Secondly, the world's violent culture has already pervaded sports, entertainment and the media as well as our schools, places of worship, shopping malls and neighborhoods. When spouse and child abuse are included, even our homes are no longer safe havens. From basic manners to cyberbullying, and from road rage to indiscriminate shootings, people just don't know how to handle their anger and frustration.

Also, with tyrannical governments in Russia and Palestine, the world is suffering from evil leadership, and even other "democracies" (including the USA) have bad leadership. Nationally, if we are forced to choose between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, we are in for more trouble. In addition, diplomacy is failing — but war is not the answer. Until forgiveness and meeting human needs are utilized, solutions won't be found.

Thirdly, there is a critical need to place guidelines and restraints on technology. I remember hearing about the dangers of the "mad scientists" during the 1940s and 1950s who had the knowledge to build weapons of mass destruction, but lacked the wisdom to know how or when or (most importantly) IF to use them. Without proper moral guidelines, this is the future that artificial intelligence (AI) and other forms of technological "progress" are taking us.

I must admit there are times when I feel completely powerless to engage in, much less solve, these critical challenges. I feel like giving up — but refuse to accept this option.

The solutions for most of these concerns are found in several areas: modeling correct moral principles in our schools, places of worship, businesses and government agencies; stabilizing family life; and replacing the inadequate paternalistic qualities of society with maternalistic qualities. These qualities are not the exclusive traits of either men or women, but are human qualities which both genders share.

After many thousands of years of power and wealth leading us to injustice and inequity, it's time to try compassion and kindness; nourishment and harmony; respect, acceptance, honesty, responsibility and humility (along with many other virtues).

I still believe in the essential goodness of people and have the faith that (if given the opportunity) human goodness

will prevail!

In any case, while the concerns are huge, the human spirit is strong. Hope for the future remains high.

Kailua resident John Heidel is a retired Christian minister, social justice activist and interfaith advocate.

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Column: Renewable energy more resilient against outages

January 14, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)
Author: Vicki Viotti | Section: Editorial | 459 Words
[OpenURL Link](#)

Blackouts show why we need more rooftop solar systems, faster.

I was disheartened to read Wednesday's misleading headline about renewable energy allegedly causing the recent rolling blackouts ("Weather, reliance on renewable energy behind Oahu's blackouts," Star-Advertiser, Jan. 10). The headline was especially off the mark since it was rebutted by facts in the article.

Traditional fossil fuel plants were the root cause of the blackouts. Two large oil-burning generators at the Waiau power plant failed on the same day, taking out 100 megawatts of power. As the article acknowledged, even in the face of bad weather, renewable energy such as battery-backed solar was capable of partially serving power needs. If the old fossil fuel generators had partially stayed on, perhaps the blackouts could have been avoided. But that is not how old generators work. When they fail, they fail.

Modern renewable energy is less clunky and more resilient against outages. Data provided by Hawaiian Electric shows that after a decade of increasing renewable energy on Oahu, outages were less frequent in 2022 than they were 10 years ago. This type of resilience can be seen in the thousands of rooftop solar systems powering Hawaii's grid. To unexpectedly lose 100 megawatts of renewable energy, 10,000 solar-powered homes would have to break down all at once. It's the difference between putting all your eggs in one basket, versus thousands.

It was also frustrating that the article rehashed a misguided debate about needing old-style "firm energy." That narrative once served the financial interests of those trying to force Big Island residents to pay for an expensive and dirty tree-burning power plant that would have made climate pollution worse. But thankfully neither the state Public Utilities Commission nor the Hawaii Supreme Court bought into the "firm energy" story when they rejected the proposed Hu Honua plant.

It is a bit ironic that Oahu's own "firm" trash-burning power plant was part of the problem during Monday's blackouts. Equally ironic and even more troubling: extreme rainfall events like the ones behind the Waiau plant's failures are predicted to increase due to climate change caused by fossil fuels like those burned at the Waiau plant.

Rather than getting distracted by the misleading idea that renewable energy caused this week's blackouts, we should be paying attention to a recent and more relevant decision by the Public Utilities Commission. The decision threatens to slow down new rooftop solar and slow our transition to a more modern and resilient grid. A more accurate and timely headline might have read "Blackouts show why we need more rooftop solar systems, faster."

Richard Wallsgrove is a professor at the William S. Richardson School of Law, University of Hawaii-Manoa, specializing in legal issues related to energy; this was submitted in his personal capacity, not on behalf of any institution.

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Hawaii lawmakers eye help for Maui, housing and ethics ahead of 2024 session

January 14, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Author: Dan Nakaso | Section: Hawaii News | 1137 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

The rebuilding of Lahaina from the tragic Maui wildfires and shortage of homes for thousands of survivors have put into sharper focus the need in Hawaii for affordable housing to help keep local residents from moving to the mainland — issues that will weigh heavily as state lawmakers convene Wednesday for the opening of the 2024 legislative session.

"The public really wants us to deal with the state budget and meet the needs of Maui," said state Rep. David Tarnas, (D, Hawi-Waimea-Waikoloa), who chairs the House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs. "Those will really be our priorities. There is less willingness to spend on new initiatives and new programs."

In general, legislators including state Sen. Brenton Awa, (R, Kaneohe-Laie-Mokuleia), like the intention underscoring much of Gov. Josh Green's first budget to "keep locals from leaving" by helping residents with housing and other ways to reduce costs.

"I'm really with the governor: 'Stop losing locals,'" Awa said.

Finding ways to help Maui wildfire survivors and the rebuilding of Lahaina will likely dominate this legislative session — the first session since the firestorm on Aug. 8 swept through the historic town, killing at least 100 people and destroying more than 3,000 buildings, most of them homes.

Awa likes Green's plan to create more long-term housing for survivors of the wildfires by converting short-term vacation rentals on Maui into long-term housing — and Green's threat to ban short-term rentals if at least 3,000 Maui property owners do not take advantage of zero property taxes and above-market rents to rent to evacuees.

Awa also would like to bar foreigners from buying agricultural lands across Hawaii like other states do — and hopes that mainland prohibitions on ag land sales to foreigners could even lead to barring nonresidents from buying homes in Hawaii.

"We need to keep locals from leaving and stop outsiders from displacing them," Awa said.

The Senate Democratic majority has prioritized its issues heading into the start of the session as emergency preparedness, recovery, and resiliency; workforce development and education; economic development and infrastructure; agriculture, environment, and natural resource management; and housing and homelessness.

"The Senate Majority is confident that, through hard-work and collaboration with our colleagues in the Senate Minority and House of Representatives, we will make significant progress on these important issues and provide much-needed assistance to our Maui Nui ohana as we navigate this recovery process together," Senate Majority Leader Dru Mamo Kanuha said in a statement.

House Democrats agree on the need to address the effects of the Maui wildfires and prevent future ones across the state; increasing affordable housing and reducing homelessness; boosting renewable energy; better addressing mental health needs; and adding more health care workers — especially for the needs of kupuna.

Proposals like charging tourists a fee to offset their impact on the environment are expected to be debated in bills and hearings through the session.

Both the public and lawmakers want to charge tourists some kind of fee to help fight against climate change and

their impact on Hawaii's environment. But there's no clear consensus on how visitors should pay, including whether through a so-called visitor impact "license" or some modification of the transient accommodations, or hotel, tax, Tarnas said.

Ethics and campaign spending reforms will also come up this session as in previous years.

The Hawaii's Ethics and Campaign Spending commissions are drafting bills to further tighten ethics and campaign spending laws after the Legislature last year passed a host of new bills based on the recommendations of the Commission to Improve Standards of Conduct after the public expressed widespread outrage over the federal convictions of former Honolulu Police Chief Louis Kealoha and his then-wife former Deputy Prosecutor Katherine Kealoha; and federal guilty pleas by former Senate Majority Leader J. Kalani English and then-vice House finance chair Rep. Ty J.K. Cullen; followed by the 2022 federal indictment of former Honolulu Prosecuting Attorney Keith Kaneshiro.

Other potential bills to clamp down on ethics violations and campaign spending violations face an uncertain future — and support — in the Legislature.

Robert D. Harris, executive director and general counsel of the state Ethics Commission, served as vice chair of the Commission to Improve Standards of Conduct, and voted against recommending term limits for state legislators as part of the commission's proposed bills last year following "a healthy discussion."

But a full-time Legislature could lead to preventing lawmakers from having second jobs and other ethics changes "that all get unlocked," Harris said.

So even though Harris initially opposed recommending a year-round legislative session, he said "the Legislature should look at it."

Bills to be introduced on behalf of the Ethics Commission include expanding lobbying restrictions to the executive branch, including for any cabinet-level official from deputy director on up; and requiring legislators to report any income from lobbyists rather than the current practice of only reporting overall income.

On Wednesday, state Sen. Karl Rhoads, (D, Nuuanu-Downtown-Iwilei), who chairs the Senate Judiciary Committee, said he plans to reintroduce his bill from last session to provide "full public financing of elections" that died during the end-of-session conference committee.

The idea would be to reduce political candidates' reliance on campaign donations to focus on the issues facing constituents.

In a statement, Rhoads said that "donors don't always line up with and represent the voters, especially in poorer districts. This bill makes it so you don't have to worry about some arbitrary group of donors and just focus on the people in your district."

Rep. Jeanne Kapela, (D, Volcano-Hawaiian Ocean View), plans to issue a House companion bill to support full public financing for candidates.

But Rhoads' counterpart in the House — Rep. Tarnas — said "the future's very cloudy in the House."

Instead, Tarnas supports expanding Hawaii's so-called partial-public, or public-private, financing of elections that allows candidates to match limited donations with public campaign funds.

Unlike full public financing of campaigns, Tarnas said the existing cost to the state for hybrid financing "is a whole lot less."

Asked about the possibility of term limits for legislators — just like their counterparts at Honolulu Hale across

Punchbowl Street — Tarnas said, "there are certain individuals outside this building that like that. But it really doesn't have a chance. I don't think there's any evidence that term limits reduces corruption. The election is how we limit terms of legislators."

Still, Tarnas pledged to consider all bills aimed at reducing corruption and campaign spending violations because "we need to restore public trust."

Other than funding for Maui and second bites at bills that rolled over from 2023 to this year, political analysts Neal Milner expects that familiar efforts to legalize gambling and recreational marijuana will come up once again only to fail.

"A lot of it (legislative session) is going to be driven directly or indirectly by the fires, like housing," Milner said.

For causes like legalizing gambling and recreational marijuana, Milner said, "there really isn't solid, passionate support for them."

Meet the 2024 Hawaii State ... by Honolulu Star-Advertiser

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Professionals discuss impacts of climate change to Hawaii at briefing

January 12, 2024 | Hawaii Tribune-Herald (Hilo, HI)

Author: LAURA RUMINSKI West Hawaii Today | 1054 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Several professionals gathered at the state capitol Thursday for an informational briefing to alert people to the immediacy and magnitude of the threat that climate change poses to Hawaii.

Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment Chair Mike Gabbard and West Hawaii Rep. Nicole Lowe, chair of the House Committee on Energy and Environmental Protection, hosted the presentation.

"Climate change has been misunderstood, downplayed, or even denied by many people - and denial does not make a problem go away, it just forestalls any action and makes the problem worse," said Gabbard. "To address a problem, we must first recognize that the problem exists and then understand its scope, scale and timing. Therefore, the purpose of this informational briefing is to bring public attention to the immediacy and magnitude of climate change.

"We need everyone's help to do the long, hard work of countering climate change as much as we can, mitigating it where we can and adapting to it as well as we can."

State Climatologist Pao-Shin Chu discussed the impact of climate change on hurricanes and drought in Hawaii.

He said during El Nino years when trade winds weaken and ocean waters warm, there are typically more tropical cyclones and hurricanes in the Central Pacific. As the Earth's temperature rises, these storms will become stronger.

"Conclusion from a study of the Northeast Pacific including Hawaii, there is essentially no change in the number of storms, but an increase in storm intensity and rainfall, 20% higher than present," he explained.

However, based on models, he expects to see more storms impacting Hawaii in the future and a shift toward an earlier onset of storms. Hurricane season in Hawaii is currently from June to November.

He also explained that during an El Nino cycle, there is less rainfall and more sunshine, which brings on droughts, usually from November to March.

"Spring and summer after El Nino sees more wildfires," he said. "Drought became more widespread and intense in the most recent decades, particularly in the last 20 years."

Dr. Charles "Chip" Fletcher, interim School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology dean, said 2023 was hottest year on record.

"Heat domes form from unstable jet stream because of warming of the arctic. The jet stream is slowing. June thru August sits way outside the trends of previous years. We see extremely hot daily temperatures," he said. "Sea surface temperatures in 2023 sat above everything in last 40 years."

He said global sea ice is far below levels from any previous recorded year.

"Scientists are speculating we are seeing an acceleration of global warming. Every month from June to December was the hottest ever recorded," he said. "The Paris agreement was set to stop warming at 1.5 degree C, however Co2 has increased, and we are on track to warm nearly 3 degree C."

Victoria Keener, co-lead of the Pacific Regional Integrated Sciences & Assessments Program said the National

Climate Assessment - released every four years localizing climate risk - shows the change exacerbates inequities and threatens ecosystems, cultural resources, human health, livelihoods and access to water and food.

She said in Hawaii, the number of hot days per year has increased dramatically. Temperatures have risen by 0.76 Fahrenheit over the past 100 years.

"Hawaii rainfall has been trending downward for decades, with the sharpest decrease in West Hawaii. Projections show more decrease in rainfall," she said. "Climate impacts are being felt now and adaptation is critical at local scales. We need to mitigate and adapt because it is only going to get worse in the coming decades. Climate change impacts access to healthy food and water. Food security is negatively impacted by rising temperatures and sea level rise."

She said 82% of heat-related deaths in Honolulu are attributed to climate change.

Wildfires also are increasing because of climate change, she said.

"The wildfire area burned has increased fourfold from the early 1990s, impacting native ecosystems," she explained. "But Indigenous knowledge systems strengthen island resilience. Local interventions can mitigate some amount of climate risk. Greenhouse gas needs to be cut 28% by 2030 to keep within the 2 degree rise in temperature."

In addition, she said rising sea levels threaten infrastructure and local economies and exacerbate existing inequities.

"Responses to rising threats may help safeguard tropical ecosystems and biodiversity," she said. "We are at a global turning point in the global energy system. Renewable energy grew by 50% last year. Oil and gas production continue to increase. We are in a sustainability transition."

"We must engage in adaptation and mitigation and be equitable in underserved communities through public health, affordable housing, education, water resources, overconsumption and disease. Sea level rise is an unstoppable reality because of warming oceans."

Models show a rise of sea level up to 6 feet by 2100. As sea level rises, there is groundwater inundation which brings polluted water to the surface.

"When it rains, we have compound flooding. Add high tide and storm drains are filled with sea water."

John Bravender, Central Pacific Hurricane Center Meteorologist, said in an average year there are four to five tropical cyclones, but in 2015 the area had 16.

"Model simulation shows formation shifting northward, causing increase in threat of making landfall in Hawaii," he said. "As ocean water gets warmer, we will see longer hurricane season. We can help mitigate the issues as we plan for the conditions. But going on past history is not enough. Building codes have changed over the years. Older homes can be retrofitted. We need to think ahead."

Tammy Lee from the Department of Transportation said her department is focused on long-term viability of the transportation infrastructure.

"Flooding due to sea level rise was studied. In the state, 10 airports would be impacted, " she said. Based on preliminary studies, we need to elevate runways or retrofit facilities at least 1 foot above the projected sea level rise over the next 100 years, or move airports inland."

She also discussed the vulnerability of the state's ports.

"98% of goods comes through our ports. Harbors are vulnerable to sea level rise. Ports may need to raise structures. Erosion is also a concern," she said.

Regarding coastal highways, she said it would cost about \$15 billion to mitigate the effects of rising sea levels.

"Today's briefing helped to ensure that chairs and committee members are up to date with the most current information about climate, and, hopefully will help educate the public on these issues as well," said Lowen after the presentation.

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Legislators urged to address climate change concerns

January 13, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Author: Victoria Budiono | Section: Hawaii News | 544 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

A wide range of experts have urged two Senate and House committees to do more to address climate change.

Following a nearly four-hour hearing Thursday, state Sen. Mike Gabbard, chair of the Senate Agriculture and Environment Committee, said that he appreciated the testimonies from representatives of 10 different groups and wants to introduce legislation that best addresses their concerns.

"I want to make it real with all the folks that came here today," Gabbard (D, Kapolei-Makakilo- Kalaeloa) told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, following the state Capitol briefing.

State Climatologist Pao-Shin Chu, a University of Hawaii School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology professor, told the joint committees that drought has become more intense in recent decades, specifically in eastern Maui and Hawaii island.

Climate change, Chu said, contributed to Hurricane Lane's 2018 torrential rain and strong winds that resulted in wildfires on Maui. Then, Chu said, climate change again contributed to Hurricane Dora's passage to the south of Hawaii island and helped drive the Aug. 8 wildfires that killed at least 100 people in Lahaina.

"It produced a very strong downslope of winds up to almost 70 mph, and it caused a problem for, particularly, Lahaina," Chu said.

His statement elicited a response from state Rep. Elle Cochran (D, Waihee- Lahaina-Lahainaluna), vice chair of the House Energy and Environmental Protection Committee. "Fifty-nine years I lived in Lahaina, I've never seen winds like that," she said.

Without any government action, Chu said, climate change will increase the frequency of tropical cyclones, leading to more problems in Hawaii such as heavy rainfall, storm surges and intense wind.

Chip Fletcher, interim UH SOEST dean, repeated expert studies that show 2023 marked the hottest year ever recorded, including the hottest months from June to November.

Fletcher said that on Oahu, Ewa Beach could see foot-tall waves in the next two decades, and Sunset Beach could see continued coastal erosion that leads to communities in both areas encountering polluted groundwater.

Victoria Keener, co-lead of the Pacific Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments Program, warned that climate change also will lead to more extreme heat unless something is done.

In Hawaii the average number of hot days has increased, while the average number of cool nights has decreased, she said. Keener said that "82% of heat-related deaths in Honolulu are already attributable to climate change."

High school students Audrey Lin and Reina Gammarino emphasized the importance of addressing climate change for future generations.

Lin, a junior at 'Iolani School and youth leader at Climate Future Forum Hawaii, said, "We are, to be frank, not pleased with the current state of affairs that we are set to inherit, and now we want to take action."

Gammarino, a Punahou School senior, told the committees, "There are so many young people ready for systematic

change, and I hope that the adults will just pause and listen."

Lin said she wants to "turn dialogue into real action" in the upcoming legislative session with proposals to charge tourists a visitor impact fee to attain sustainable tourism.

At the end of the hearing, Gabbard told the Star-Advertiser that it's his duty as a legislator to review climate change bills that have not been passed in previous sessions and introduce new ones based on more recent input.

"Now, with all the presentations made, we have a treasure trove that we can use," he said.

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Red Sea shipping attacks have impacts in Pacific

January 13, 2024 | Hawaii Tribune-Herald (Hilo, HI)

Author: KEVIN KNODELL The Honolulu Star-Advertiser/TNS| 1287 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Ongoing attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea by Houthi militants from Yemen are causing ripples here in the Pacific.

The violence has prompted most major shipping companies to divert vessels from traveling through the Suez Canal, forcing them to take much longer routes around the South African Cape of Good Hope. It's causing massive delays and rising costs, and analysts warn that if the shipping disruption continues long term, it could contribute to severe global inflation.

Akhil Ramesh, a senior researcher at the Honolulu-based Pacific Forum, which studies the intersection of economic, trade and national security policy in the Indo-Pacific, said that "the issue in the Red Sea affects countries that have any economic interests around the globe - so it affects all nations in the world."

Iranian-backed Houthi militants had been periodically attacking merchant vessels passing through the Red Sea through much of 2023, but upped the ante Nov. 19 when a group of fighters flew and landed a helicopter on the Galaxy Leader, a Japanese-operated cargo ship with links to an Israeli company, and seized it.

The group said the hijacking was to show solidarity with Palestinians as Israel continues to wage a bloody offensive in Gaza that has leveled entire neighborhoods in retaliation for the Oct. 7 massacres in Israel by the militant group Hamas. The Houthis pledged to attack any ship they believe is traveling to or from Israel.

But since then the group has attacked ships that don't have clear ties to Israel. Since seizing the Galaxy Leader, Houthi militants have attacked commercial ships at least 23 times - including strikes by drones and ballistic missiles.

On Wednesday the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution calling for an immediate end to the attacks. On Thursday the U.S. and British militaries launched strikes on several Houthi-controlled sites in Yemen as tensions continued to escalate.

Before the recent crisis about 30% of global container traffic and more than 1 million barrels of crude oil made their way through the Suez Canal per day, according to data from the global freight booking platform Freightos Group. Maritime consultancy company Drewry's World Container Index showed global shipping rates jumping 61% over the first week of 2024, and attributed the spike to the Red Sea attacks.

"Anywhere in the world, if there's a disruption in the shipping lanes, it will affect the prices of your everyday goods - especially if it affects the price of crude," said Ramesh. "If the overall larger market is affected, at the end of the day, your products on the shelf are affected."

Countries across the Pacific have been showing increasing concern as merchant ships and workers from the region find themselves in the cross-fire. Last week Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand were among the Pacific countries that joined the United States in making a joint statement calling for an end to the attacks, charging that the Houthis are "jeopardizing the movement of critical food, fuel, and humanitarian assistance throughout the world."

While the violence in the Red Sea is causing economic anxiety across the globe, some maritime industry companies in the Pacific potentially stand to benefit.

In an article published Saturday in the shipping trade publication Freight Waves, industry analyst Zach Strickland wrote that "disproportionate shipping rate increases resulting from the Red Sea attacks further incentivize shippers to bring freight into the U.S. West Coast from Asia, as a pandemic-era pattern of shipping to Eastern ports continues to unwind."

But that doesn't necessarily mean any relief for Hawaii consumers buying goods coming into Hawaii's ports.

Ramesh explained that "you will still be affected because price of crude oils will be up in the market, which will shoot up the price of commodities that Hawaii imports ... because whoever is shipping it in, whether it's coming from California or Washington state, (prices are) still going to be up."

Armed conflicts around the globe have in recent years made supply chains prone to disruption - and Hawaii has frequently had to adapt to those disruptions.

In 2019 the majority of imported crude oil to Hawaii came from Libya (57%), followed by Russia (34%). The Libyan oil made its way to Hawaii in tankers traveling through the Suez Canal, into the Red Sea, across the Indian Ocean and through the South China Sea before finally docking in Hawaii. But in 2020, Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar seized oil fields in the country with the help of Russian Wagner Group mercenaries, disrupting global markets.

That year Libya provided only 16% of Hawaii's oil, while Russia remained at 34%, becoming Hawaii's top overall source for 2020. The disruption forced Par Pacific - which owns Hawaii's only oil refinery - to turn to other sources, including the war-torn Republic of Congo and others, to make up the difference for Hawaii's needs.

In March 2022 Par Pacific announced it would stop importing Russian oil after the Kremlin launched its invasion of western Ukraine. In the days after, President Joe Biden signed an executive order banning Russian energy imports, and Hawaiian Electric - which relies largely on petroleum-powered generators - announced that due to rising oil prices and Russia sanctions, residential customers would see price hikes.

But Par Pacific says it doesn't anticipate that the current crisis will affect its ability to get oil.

"We do not anticipate this will have any impact on our crude supply for Hawaii; however, we are continuing to closely monitor the situation," said Par Pacific spokesman Marc Inouye. "It's important to note we receive our crude oil from a number of geographical locations throughout the globe, and this diversity helps to support energy assurance for our islands."

Nevertheless, the price of oil is going up worldwide amid the attacks. Rakesh said that in particular when it comes to oil imports, the Red Sea crisis could add fuel to the ongoing debate over how to make Hawaii more self-sufficient. Hawaii has been one of the country's most petroleum-dependent states and is trying to diversify its power grid.

Hawaii is also more dependent on foreign oil sources than other states, as few U.S.-flagged oil tankers service routes that transport American oil to Hawaii and other Pacific island territories. And under the federal Jones Act, foreign-flagged ships cannot participate in interstate trade between American ports, meaning they cannot legally pick up oil from the mainland and deliver it to Hawaii.

In 2014 a state task force predicted that "if access to foreign sources of petroleum products is reduced (e.g., due to Chinese growth, Korean peninsula instability, Asian natural disasters impacting supply sources), Hawaii may need to rely on a significant amount of domestic supply and be exposed to higher freight costs. These costs will directly impact consumers."

In 2015 Hawaii became the first state to pledge to work toward powering the state with 100% renewable energy by 2045 both to fight climate change and make the islands more self-sufficient. But that has come with challenges of its own.

Planned solar farm and battery storage projects have faced delays or cancellation, and some officials have warned

about possible electricity shortages occurring in the wake of decommissioning a large coal-fired power plant with those projects still not complete.

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Letter: Unrealistic green-energy policies leave us in dark

January 12, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Section: Editorial | 236 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

On Monday, we got a taste of the ugly future that awaits us as we near our state-imposed goal of being completely fossil-free by the year 2045. Hawaiian Electric (HECO) is in compliance with legislative goals limiting electricity-generation options — and now we face the reality of rolling blackouts or mandated reduction of power consumption.

When HECO ended its power production at its coal-fired plant on Aug. 31, 2022, we did not have adequate reliable surplus power resources to offset the loss of 20% of HECO's power supply.

HECO currently relies upon community power generation via private roof-top photo voltaic panels. When it rains all day as it did on Monday, there is no power to the grid, and everyone must rely on HECO-generated power. Lucky for us the sun was shining today.

Hawaii citizens must speak out in opposition to the imposition of unrealistic climate change policies. Or, we will all be sitting in the dark, waiting for the power to go back on.

John Tamashiro

Pearl City

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'Denial does not make - a problem go away'

January 12, 2024 | West Hawaii Today (Kailua-Kona, HI)

Author: Laura Ruminski West Hawaii Today lruminski@westhawaii.com 1059 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Several professionals gathered at the state capitol Thursday for an informational briefing to alert people to the immediacy and magnitude of the threat that climate change poses to Hawaii.

Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment Chair Mike Gabbard and West Hawaii Rep. Nicole Lowe, chair of the House Committee on Energy and Environmental Protection, hosted the presentation.

"Climate change has been misunderstood, downplayed, or even denied by many people - and denial does not make a problem go away, it just forestalls any action and makes the problem worse," said Gabbard. "To address a problem, we must first recognize that the problem exists and then understand its scope, scale and timing. Therefore, the purpose of this informational briefing is to bring public attention to the immediacy and magnitude of climate change.

"We need everyone's help to do the long, hard work of countering climate change as much as we can, mitigating it where we can and adapting to it as well as we can."

State Climatologist Pao-Shin Chu discussed the impact of climate change on hurricanes and drought in Hawaii.

He said during El Nino years when trade winds weaken and ocean waters warm, there are typically more tropical cyclones and hurricanes in the Central Pacific. As the Earth's temperature rises, these storms will become stronger.

"Conclusion from a study of the Northeast Pacific including Hawaii, there is essentially no change in the number of storms, but an increase in storm intensity and rainfall, 20% higher than present," he explained.

However, based on models, he expects to see more storms impacting Hawaii in the future and a shift toward an earlier onset of storms. Hurricane season in Hawaii is currently from June to November.

He also explained that during an El Nino cycle, there is less rainfall and more sunshine, which brings on droughts, usually from November to March.

"Spring and summer after El Nino sees more wildfires," he said. "Drought became more widespread and intense in the most recent decades, particularly in the last 20 years."

Dr. Charles "Chip" Fletcher, interim School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology dean, said 2023 was hottest year on record.

"Heat domes form from unstable jet stream because of warming of the arctic. The jet stream is slowing. June thru August sits way outside the trends of previous years. We see extremely hot daily temperatures," he said. "Sea surface temperatures in 2023 sat above everything in last 40 years."

He said global sea ice is far below levels from any previous recorded year.

"Scientists are speculating we are seeing an acceleration of global warming. Every month from June to December was the hottest ever recorded," he said. "The Paris agreement was set to stop warming at 1.5 degree C, however Co2 has increased, and we are on track to warm nearly 3 degree C."

Victoria Keener, co-lead of the Pacific Regional Integrated Sciences & Assessments Program said the National

Climate Assessment - released every four years localizing climate risk - shows the change exacerbates inequities and threatens ecosystems, cultural resources, human health, livelihoods and access to water and food.

She said in Hawaii, the number of hot days per year has increased dramatically. Temperatures have risen by 0.76 Fahrenheit over the past 100 years.

"Hawaii rainfall has been trending downward for decades, with the sharpest decrease in West Hawaii. Projections show more decrease in rainfall," she said. "Climate impacts are being felt now and adaptation is critical at local scales. We need to mitigate and adapt because it is only going to get worse in the coming decades. Climate change impacts access to healthy food and water. Food security is negatively impacted by rising temperatures and sea level rise."

She said 82% of heat-related deaths in Honolulu are attributed to climate change.

Wildfires also are increasing because of climate change, she said.

"The wildfire area burned has increased fourfold from the early 1990s, impacting native ecosystems," she explained. "But Indigenous knowledge systems strengthen island resilience. Local interventions can mitigate some amount of climate risk. Greenhouse gas needs to be cut 28% by 2030 to keep within the 2 degree rise in temperature.

In addition, she said rising sea levels threaten infrastructure and local economies and exacerbate existing inequities.

"Responses to rising threats may help safeguard tropical ecosystems and biodiversity," she said. "We are at a global turning point in the global energy system. Renewable energy grew by 50% last year. Oil and gas production continue to increase. We are in a sustainability transition.

"We must engage in adaptation and mitigation and be equitable in underserved communities through public health, affordable housing, education, water resources, overconsumption and disease. Sea level rise is an unstoppable reality because of warming oceans."

Models show a rise of sea level up to 6 feet by 2100. As sea level rises, there is groundwater inundation which brings polluted water to the surface.

"When it rains, we have compound flooding. Add high tide and storm drains are filled with sea water."

John Bravender, Central Pacific Hurricane Center Meteorologist, said in an average year there are four to five tropical cyclones, but in 2015 the area had 16.

"Model simulation shows formation shifting northward, causing increase in threat of making landfall in Hawaii," he said. "As ocean water gets warmer, we will see longer hurricane season. We can help mitigate the issues as we plan for the conditions. But going on past history is not enough. Building codes have changed over the years. Older homes can be retrofitted. We need to think ahead."

Tammy Lee from the Department of Transportation said her department is focused on long-term viability of the transportation infrastructure.

"Flooding due to sea level rise was studied. In the state, 10 airports would be impacted, " she said. Based on preliminary studies, we need to elevate runways or retrofit facilities at least 1 foot above the projected sea level rise over the next 100 years, or move airports inland."

She also discussed the vulnerability of the state's ports.

"98% of goods comes through our ports. Harbors are vulnerable to sea level rise. Ports may need to raise structures. Erosion is also a concern," she said.

Regarding coastal highways, she said it would cost about \$15 billion to mitigate the effects of rising sea levels.

"Today's briefing helped to ensure that chairs and committee members are up to date with the most current information about climate, and, hopefully will help educate the public on these issues as well," said Lowen after the presentation.

To view the forum, visit capitol.hawaii.gov/livevideo.aspx

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Firm fighting climate lawsuit accused of aggressive tactics

January 11, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Author: Timothy Hurley | Section: Hawaii News | 932 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Gov. Josh Green's administration is requesting an additional \$2.25 million to fight the climate lawsuit brought by 14 Hawaii youths claiming that the state Department of Transportation has violated their constitutional rights "to live healthful lives in Hawai'i now and into the future."

The money will be used to pay for an outside law firm that has already joined the state Attorney General's Office in representing the department in a case set to go to trial June 24 through July 12 in the 1st Circuit's Environmental Court in

Honolulu.

Attorneys for the young plaintiffs are accusing their counterparts from the law firm of Morgan Lewis & Bockius of using some aggressive, mainland-style tactics to harass the plaintiffs during individual depositions currently being taken with each of the 14 Hawaii youths.

"I don't think that locally based attorneys would treat their own keiki that way," said Kylie Wager-Cruz, a

Honolulu-based attorney with Earthjustice.

Navahine F. v. Hawaii Department of Transportation is set to become only the second constitutional climate case to go to trial in the United States.

In the first one, a district court judge in Montana in August ruled in favor of 16 youth plaintiffs who argued that lawmakers prioritized the development of fossil

fuels over the well-being

of Montana's residents and the protection of natural

resources.

The groundbreaking ruling sets a precedent that might have some influence in Hawaii, where a suit argues that the DOT operates a system that emits high levels of greenhouse gasses, violating the young plaintiffs' state constitutional rights and causing them significant harm.

The complaint asserts that even as Hawaii has sought to be a leader in climate action, emissions from the transportation sector keep rising, with the DOT unable to hit interim benchmarks to reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions since 2008.

With plaintiffs ranging in age from 10 to 20, the lawsuit aims to hold the department accountable to ensure it meets the state's goal to decarbonize Hawaii's transportation sector and achieve a zero-emissions economy by 2045, attorneys said.

The Green administration is asking for an additional \$2.25 million to fight the case as part of the fiscal year 2025 supplemental

budget. The money is in addition to the \$1 million secured in the past session to pay for the outside law firm.

Hourly rates for attorneys at Morgan Lewis range between \$600 and \$1,200 an hour. The "global" law firm has offices around the world and counts among its clientele former President Donald Trump; Sam Bankman-Fried, the cryptocurrency executive found guilty of fraud; and Amazon, for the purposes of preventing the unionization of Amazon workers.

Asked about the firm, the state Department of Attorney General responded that the decision to retain outside counsel was made by the previous administration.

"We understand that the decision was made due to the importance and scope of the lawsuit and the number of vacancies in the department at the time," the department said in an email.

The department said it disputes any negative characterization of the way the depositions are being conducted.

"We are taking the plaintiffs' claims seriously — and that means we want to hear their stories in their own words and not

filtered through their attorneys. Depositions are being conducted in an age-appropriate and respectful manner."

A deposition is a witness's sworn out-of-court testimony. It is used to gather information as part of the discovery process and can be used at trial in some instances.

The first plaintiff to be deposed was Kalalapa Winter, the eldest of the plaintiffs. The University of Southern California sophomore and Mid-Pacific Institute graduate was 18 when the suit was filed and 19 during her deposition in Honolulu last week, but she turned 20 this week.

Winter described her deposition as "pretty crazy" and "kind of insane."

"I don't think any of us were expecting that," she said.

She said the attorney asking her questions was rude, aggressive and disrespectful. At one point Winter was brought to tears.

"It's clear to me, whoever the attorney is fighting for, she doesn't really care about my story or my fellow plaintiffs' stories. It's really upsetting," she said.

Winter, who grew up in Haena and Hanalei on Kauai, joined the lawsuit in part because of what happened to her community in 2018. That's when a massive storm over Kauai caused \$180 million in damage, wrecked hundreds of homes and unleashed landslides that cut off the island's north shore communities for months.

The unprecedented "rain bomb" dropped nearly

50 inches of rainfall in a 24-hour period, shattering the previous 24-hour U.S. rainfall record of 42 inches set in Texas nearly 40 years earlier.

"It destroyed my entire community, and they spent years rebuilding it," she said.

In the suit, Winter, an avid surfer, also described how climate change-driven beach erosion smothers coral reefs, harms local fish populations and alters surf breaks.

The attorney didn't ask about those things, Winter said, but instead she ended up berating and questioning her "as if I was supposed to know obscure knowledge about the DOT and the state Constitution."

"They were so mean," she said. "It was very clear that one of the lawyers was not from Hawaii. To be mean to children doesn't make any sense. It's infuriating.

"I really don't understand. You would think the government would want to work with us, not against us," she said.

Earthjustice's Wager-Cruz said two of the plaintiffs have been deposed to date and so far questions by the outside counsel have been "over the top" and "out of bounds," designed to harass and rattle the youngsters.

Questions, she said, feel like pop quizzes on the science and the law and do not focus on their stories about how they have been affected by climate change.

"If the governor knew this was happening, I don't think he'd be happy with it,"

Wager-Cruz said.

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Maui trees are taller than estimated, study finds

January 8, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Author: Timothy Hurley | Section: Hawaii News | 548 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

Turns out the trees of Maui are taller than previously thought.

In fact, a new effort to map the height of the island's forests reveals that a stretch of midlevel trees, covering about 1,000 acres in windward East Maui, are twice as tall as they were previously thought to be. That puts the height of the forest in those areas soaring up to 130 feet.

Overall, Maui forest trees previously thought to range in size from 33 to 66 feet were found to be 3 to 16 feet taller on average.

The information comes from the newly published 30-meter Maui Forest Height Map by a research team led by Qi Chen, a University of Hawaii at Manoa geography professor in the College of Social Sciences.

The fact that Maui's trees are taller challenges past assumptions about the island's forests and suggests they may be more resilient in the face of climate change.

Their greater stature, Chen said, also could demand a reexamination of environmental resource management across the island.

Chen's groundbreaking work utilized remote sensing technology (airborne lidar) as reference data to train models based on satellite imagery, surpassing the accuracy of traditional mapping methods.

Then, like doctors examining an X-ray, the researchers analyzed the colors and values of each pixel in satellite and lidar imagery to estimate the height of trees at various locations.

Calculating the horizontal spread of forests is relatively simple, but determining their vertical height has been an ongoing challenge.

"It's hard to measure every single tree in any forest," Chen said.

A handful of federal agencies joined the Nature Conservancy in hiring a firm to measure the height of Hawaii's forests about 10 years ago, but technology that required cloudless days forced the effort to be abandoned after a few months, leaving a knowledge gap about the forest, he said.

Chen, an expert on remote sensing who joined the UH faculty in 2007, said the latest height estimates for Maui's forests have significant implications for determining the impact of the forest on the environment.

"The revised height estimates for Maui forests will help enhance the accuracy of calculations for factors like evapotranspiration, wind speed and carbon sequestration rates," Chen said, adding that it also will help in the development of more precise ecological models.

Accurate information about forest height is important for a number of reasons.

Taller trees, in general, offer greater ecosystem services, affecting everything from water yield to carbon sequestration and wildlife habitat, Chen said.

Taller trees capture more water from the clouds. That fact, he said, could offer additional data to accurately

evaluate the upstream freshwater yield, which is a crucial consideration for town planning in watersheds like Lahaina.

Forests with diverse heights also tend to support more biodiversity and are thus healthier and more resilient.

"Smaller trees don't host as many insects and animals," he said.

Larger trees also can capture more carbon in the atmosphere and are better at combating climate change.

The Maui Forest Height Map is an extension of a similar map developed for Oahu and released in 2021. The research team plans to expand its efforts, with maps of Kauai and Hawaii island expected in 2024 and 2025, respectively.

The project has received funding of \$119,500 since 2019, with \$23,500 allocated for the Maui Forest Height Map, from the U.S. Geological Survey through AmericaView.

The Maui Forest Height Map can be found online at hawaiiiview.org/data/l2fhm-maui.

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Stalled bills have second life in 2024 legislative session

January 8, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)
Author: Dan Nakaso | Section: Hawaii News | 860 Words
[OpenURL Link](#)

Dozens of bills from the 2023 legislative session that failed to become law remain alive going into the Jan. 17 start of the upcoming session, including one that would eliminate the Hawaii Tourism Authority and create a new tourism entity.

House Bill 1375, House Draft 3, Senate Draft 3 would create the Office of Tourism and Destination Management within the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism and take over HTA functions.

The bill represented the latest attack on the HTA by factions in the Legislature following successful previous efforts to gut HTA's

budget.

HB 1375 made it all the way to the end-of-session conference committee but was instead rolled over to the upcoming session.

Mufi Hannemann took over as chair of the HTA board in December and said HTA opposes HB 1375 and will answer all questions from the Legislature to show it has changed in the face of criticism.

Hannemann acknowledged it will be "a tall order."

"But I really believe we'll have a very compelling case to make that things are changing and we are heading in a new direction," Hannemann said. "There will be no more ducking controversial questions, no more evading the facts, no more embellishment, just straight up, 'this is where we are.'"

Other bills that remain alive also never made it out of conference committee or stalled after either the Senate or House tweaked details of bills that started in the opposite chamber.

They could die a quick death early in the session, sail through or face an uncertain future at the end of this year's joint House and Senate conference committee following months of debate, testimony and votes.

They would affect life in Hawaii in small and big ways, and include:

A new visitor impact fee on tourists intended to offset their impact on state lands and to help address climate change. The state Department of Land and Natural Resources would charge for a "license" for tourists to visit certain state parks, forests, hiking trails and other state nature areas. DLNR also would have to create a strategic plan and timetable for the Legislature under SB 304, SD 2, HD 3.

Public financing of state and county election campaigns would be expanded under SB 1543, SD 2, HD 2. Proponents of publicly financed election campaigns believe they are a way to

attract a broader range of candidates without heavy reliance on campaign contributions, which they believe can lead to undue influence and even political

corruption.

Fines of up to \$250,000, imprisonment or probation could be imposed for anyone convicted of bribery under HB

126, HD 1, SD 1.

It would be a Class C felony to make false,

fictitious or fraudulent claims against the government under HB 707, HD 1,

SD 1. A person convicted of making a false, fictitious or fraudulent claim would be barred from holding elected office for five years.

A new offense of "fraud" would be a Class B felony, and anyone merely charged with fraud would be barred from elected office for 10 years under HB 711, HD 1, SD 1.

People who fail to respond to an alleged campaign spending law violation from the state Campaign Spending Commission within 30 days would be considered to be in violation of the accusations under

HB 732, HD 1, SD 1.

A cap would be imposed to search, review and reproduce government records under HB 719, HD 1, SD 2.

Fees also could be waived "when the public interest

is served by a record's

disclosure."

Out-of-state, licensed practical nurses and registered nurses — who were badly needed during the COVID-19 pandemic that started in March 2020 — would be issued six-month permits to practice in Hawaii under SB 63, SD 2, HD 3.

A "Prevent Suicide Hawai'i Working Group" would be created within the Office of Wellness and Resilience to focus on preventing suicides, especially among Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, farmers, youth, LGBTQIA+, veterans and other high-risk populations identified by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention under HB 622, HD 2, SD 2.

A new "Hawaii Farm to Food Bank Program" would be created under SB 430, SD 2, HD 1 and would provide funds to reduce food shortages, which also became critical during COVID-19.

Government agencies would be required to seek repayment for search or

rescue costs to search for or rescue someone who leaves a hiking trail or enters an area closed to the public if signs warn the area is closed.

The idea behind SB 786, SD 1, HD 2 frequently comes up at the Legislature, but first responders have testified in opposition that charging people who need to be found or rescued might deter them from seeking help.

Candidates, campaign treasurers and candidate committee members would be allowed to use campaign funds for child care and household dependent care in certain conditions under SB 627, HD 2.

A new combat sports commission would be created to regulate combat sports. "No rules" combat events also would be prohibited under SB 1027, SD 1, HD 1.

Funds would be provided to DLNR to have its Historic Preservation Division inventory historic properties and burial sites, document burial site locations and conduct an archaeological surface survey under SB 75, SD 2, HD 1.

Special numbered

license plates would be

issued to honor legendary waterman Duke Kahanamoku under HB 110, HD 1, SD 1.

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Plan for largest Hawaii hydroelectric plant is downsized

January 7, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Author: Andrew Gomes | Section: Hawaii News | 938 Words

[OpenURL Link](#)

An ambitious plan to develop a renewable energy project on Kauai that would have been the biggest hydroelectric power plant in Hawaii has been scaled back and may not go forward at all.

Kauai's nonprofit electric utility recently announced that part of its West Kauai Energy Project with developer and operator AES Corp. has been canceled, and that it is uncertain whether the remainder of the overall \$250 million project remains financially feasible.

Issues with the project, where planning stretches back more than a decade, are rooted in longstanding contentions over using mountain stream water leading to the Waimea River and other parts of West Kauai.

Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative proposed to restore parts of the century-old Kokee agricultural irrigation ditch system, which includes high-elevation reservoirs, to channel water through turbines producing electricity and also distribute some water to agricultural land owned by the state.

KIUC's plan included a higher elevation turbine to produce 4 megawatts of electricity, and a base-level operation featuring a hydroelectric turbine producing 20 megawatts of power as well as a 35-megawatt solar farm that would partly be used to feed the grid and to pump water back up to a midlevel reservoir where water would be released to produce electricity when no solar energy is being generated.

The project, designed to operate for 50 to 80 years, was estimated to provide Kauai with 25% of its energy, increase the amount of renewable energy generation on the island to more than 80% from about 60%, displace more than 8 million gallons of fossil fuel annually and cut costs for customers somewhere between \$157 million and \$172 million over an initial 25 years.

Two Kauai community groups concerned with water use filed a lawsuit in February against the state Department of Land and Natural Resources contending that the agency's director should not have accepted the project's environmental assessment report, which the groups also contend is inadequate.

The lawsuit, filed by the Earthjustice law firm on behalf of Po'ai Wai Ola and Na Kia'i Kai, asserted that a more comprehensive environmental impact statement should have been done, and that the existing report didn't assess consequences of discharging much of the channeled water onto the Mana Plain where agricultural use was envisioned but not specified or certain.

According to the environmental report, KIUC and AES expected to divert an average of 11 million gallons a day — or 4 billion gallons a year — from reaching the Waimea River for 65 years. The lawsuit contends that discharge of this water after being used to produce electricity would collect sediment, pesticides and other pollution on its way out into the ocean.

Po'ai Wai Ola previously had been involved in a regulatory battle over Waimea River flow levels being negatively affected by upstream diversions into the Kokee and Kekaha irrigation ditch systems being wasted after closure of the Kekaha Sugar Co. plantation in 2000.

That regulatory battle resulted in a 2017 mediated agreement that included 11 million gallons of daily water use for the contemplated West Kauai Energy Project.

The still-pending lawsuit contends that KIUC and AES expect to dump all that water into the Mana Plain drainage

system after electricity production, which Po'ai Wai Ola called a waste.

"We're not against renewable energy," John A'ana, Po'ai Wai Ola vice president and a longtime kalo farmer, said last year. "But we are against diverting and dumping river water for energy."

KIUC said it scaled back the West Kauai Energy plan because of litigation-caused delays, project uncertainty and cost increases.

The scaled-back version comprises only the solar farm and pumping water from a base-level reservoir up to a midlevel reservoir for release back down to the base-level reservoir and hydroelectric power generation. Dropping the other part, hydroelectric power generated from water flowing through an improved ditch system from the mountaintop to the base facility, will reduce electricity production by about 25%, according to KIUC.

KIUC said it hasn't yet been determined whether the scaled-back version is financially viable.

"While it's unfortunate that the full potential of the environmental, social and economic benefits of WKEP will not be realized, we retain hope WKEP will still be an important piece of KIUC's renewable portfolio," David Bissell, KIUC president and CEO, said in a statement.

At one time, the utility company anticipated that it could have the full West Kauai Energy Project operating by 2024. That was pushed back to 2026 and most recently to at least 2028 before the latest change.

KIUC said it will still make an initial phase of Kokee ditch improvements called for in the mediated agreement regardless of whether it proceeds with the scaled-back project.

Other improvements, the company said, won't be done, including rehabilitating the upper-level Puu Lua Reservoir that would have allowed for more recreational use, fixing other parts of the ditch system and delivering water to other users. These other users include the state Department of Hawaiian Homelands, DLNR and the state Agribusiness Development Corp.

Plaintiffs in the lawsuit challenging the hydroelectric project endorsed the scaled-back plan.

A'ana called it the right next step. "The community supported the pump- storage proposal from the beginning," he said in a statement from Earthjustice. "The problems started when KIUC added the flow-thru system to the project."

Galen Ka'ohi, president of Po'ai Wai Ola, said in the statement that he is relieved that KIUC is no longer pursuing the flow-thru hydro system. "It does not make sense to take 4 billion gallons of water a year for the next 65 years from a river that is already suffering from reduced flows because of climate change," he said. "We need to protect the water, safeguard the streams, and figure out ways to produce energy that does not harm this essential resource."

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Column: Outlook for Indo-Pacific, global growth epicenter

January 7, 2024 | Honolulu Star-Advertiser (HI)

Section: Editorial | 697 Words

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While conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine overshadow world events at the onset of 2024, in the longer term the Indo-Pacific region remains by far the most important part of the world for global peace and prosperity. With more than 40 countries and 60% of world population, the Indo-Pacific is still the epicenter of global growth, and no other region offers more opportunities, as well as challenges, for the United States.

Of the region's many issues in this coming year, three stand out for us.

The first is what 2024 might tell us about the direction of the world's second-most powerful country, China. It appears to have reached an important crossroads, facing significant economic and political headwinds. The Chinese economy failed to rebound vigorously from the pandemic; consumer and investment confidence is anemic; and young people are having trouble finding rewarding jobs. Global public opinion surveys, meanwhile, show increasing international anxiety over China's more aggressive foreign policy and security policies.

All these forces may have influenced Xi Jinping to seek more stable relations with the U.S. in his November meeting with President Joe Biden, but the question is how much this is a tactical move rather than being part of a sustained strategy. An early test may be Beijing's response to the Taiwan presidential election on Jan. 13.

China regards Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as being bent on formal independence. If the DPP candidate, current Vice President Lai Ching-te, wins as widely anticipated, Xi may be tempted to increase provocations leading up to Lai's inauguration in May as a way to cow the new leader. However, this move would not only strengthen resentment toward the mainland in Taiwan but increase tensions with the United States and further alarm potential investors, dealing yet another blow to the Chinese economy.

The second key issue is the global future of democracy and its essential building block, a free and trustworthy press. More than 50 countries around the world have elections scheduled in 2024, a new record. Meanwhile here at home, fundamental issues of American policy hang in the balance of our own presidential election in November.

A primary concern amid so much potential global political change is the explosion of disinformation enhanced by artificial intelligence's ability to reinforce biases.

This is especially troubling with research suggesting an ongoing erosion of faith in democratic institutions and media worldwide. The East-West Center has long tracked such issues through our diverse journalism programs, and we'll be exploring them further at our biennial International Media Conference on "The Future of Facts" this summer in Manila, a regional hot spot at the intersection of democracy and media.

Finally, there is the pressing challenge of climate change, which is especially acute for the Pacific Islands — not just because of sea level rise, an existential threat to low-lying atolls, but also more frequent violent storms, prolonged droughts and ocean acidification.

For island communities at risk, this past month's U.N. climate summit in Dubai was a mixed blessing. The goal of transitioning away from fossil fuels was formally recognized, and developed countries pledged increased support for adaptation efforts in smaller and less wealthy states. But so far, major emitters have not made the policy changes needed to contain temperature rise to the goal of 1.5 degrees centigrade.

We deeply believe that Hawaii has a special responsibility in the Pacific, with similar heritage and challenges coupled with a state economy that is more than double that of all developing Pacific Islands economies combined.

Hawaii institutions can help provide needed analysis on how climate change will affect the island environments and economies, assist in developing climate adaptation strategies, and train local experts.

Whatever else is happening in the world, the United States certainly cannot afford to take its eye off the Indo-Pacific region. As Star-Advertiser reporter (and EWC media program alum) Kevin Knodell wrote in his recent article, "Hawaii playing a central part in the 'Pacific Century,'" the East-West Center and other locally based educational and policy institutions will continue to play a vital role as bridges to the region and standard bearers of Hawaii's engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

Suzanne Vares-Lum is East-West Center president; Charles E. Morrison is the center's former president and current senior fellow.

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Tropical Gardening: Winter storms can wreak havoc on homes and gardens

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Author: NORMAN BEZONA Professor emeritus, University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources 826 Words

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We often find ourselves worried about storm damage as hurricane season approaches in June. Hurricanes can cause tremendous damage on the rare occasion that one comes our way, but they are few and far between. The facts show that on an annual basis, we have more cumulative damage due to high winds and rains from storms from February through March. This means now is the time to do the pruning required to keep our trees healthy.

What we have learned from storms when a cold front comes from the Gulf of Alaska with high winds, is that the major damage done from actual winds was to trees like lychee, macadamia, mahogany and other broadleaved trees. However, palms like Coconut, Royal, Cabbage Palms, Mexican Fan Palms, Pritchardia and scores of others survive the storm winds. Many will tolerate flooding with little damage as well.

If the soil was so soggy that the palms tipped over, they were easy to replant and recover. Since there are hundreds of species, the question is - which palms can be used to create your tropical landscape with a minimum of storm damage and care? The Hawaii Island Palm Society is available to help folks answer that question so check out their website. The UH College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources master gardeners help line can also be of service. In East Hawaii, call 808-981-5199. In West Hawaii, the number is 808-322-4893.

When it comes to trees other than palms, remember they are important elements of parks, streets and home gardens. Do not forget that they supply oxygen, sequester carbon and in general are helping to minimize the negative effects of global climate change. However, they do require proper maintenance to ensure they make it through stormy weather. It is always important to inspect your trees for dead branches that seem to be ready to fall. A gust of wind can snap an arm-size branch from a tree and send it at missile speed through a picture window.

A low hanging branch over a roof can wreak havoc. Powerful winds can turn the limb into a tool of destruction. This tool can remove shingles as easily as a fish can remove scales. Removing dead and out of place limbs is a good idea even if there is no storm.

Fan-like fungus growing on the side of a tree trunk indicates rotten spots that need attention. A hole made by poor pruning, damage from earlier storms, or the gouge of an auto bumper can start rotten spots.

Remove decayed trees that are too weak to hold up under the strain of a storm. This action will save you grief later.

Actually, even a 60-mile-an-hour wind is not as dangerous as it sounds if necessary measures are taken before the wind reaches gale force.

If your home is located in an area that might be flooded, you'll be given ample notice to evacuate hours before the storm reaches your area. Otherwise, there is no safer place than in a well built home.

Once the storm has passed it is a good idea to inspect the trees and other plants around the house. Usually all the plants will show signs of wind damage. With a little trimming, propping, resettling of root systems, fertilizing and watering, nearly all plants that were shaken loose from the ground can be salvaged. After March, it is a good idea to consider root pruning as a way to manage those larger trees. If in doubt on what to do, you may contact a local certified arborist to assess the situation and correct it.

Many of our tropical trees grow rampant with extensive root systems. That is why we prune to keep them from getting out of hand, but let us prune the right way. Late spring and summer are not the best time for heavy pruning since shade is at a premium during those hot days ahead. February is a good time as the days are getting longer

but the sun's rays are less intense than after March when spring and summer are upon us.

In conclusion, remember that trees are vital to making urban life healthier for us physically, mentally and even spiritually. Forest fires, storms and drought are destroying our forests on a global scale. On the other hand, every time we plant a tree, we help to minimize the effects of global warming.

Enjoy those beautiful trees in your garden by maintaining them correctly. On a grander scale, work with Hawaii County and State governments to plant more trees in parks, roads and highways. We depend on the tourist industry. Visitors to our islands as well as residents appreciate our beautiful landscapes. Without trees, this would just be another barren desert island. Palms, because of their beauty and tenacity make a great choice.

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