

2.9.10

Subject: In favor of CA-15 / CA-25

Aloha Commissioners,

This is my citizen testimony on several matters before the commission, specifically CA-15 and CA-25.

According to research done by a local citizen advocacy group, the County of Hawai'i budget has more than doubled over the last decade. Specifically, county budgets have increased 120%. During this same time the population of our county has grown by only about 20%. It does not appear that taxpayers have received a 120% increase in delivery of services in the same time period.

It is well documented that significant beneficiaries in County budgeting are vendors and contractors. In these hard economic times this group has not been asked, except by direct public action, to "share the pain" in their work and supply to our county government. In addition, there are documented examples where direct public action was required to address issues of favoritism built into the language of some RFPs and/or RFQs, and where correcting the illegalities resulted in significant and direct cost savings to taxpayers (who are the providers of county funds in the first place). Please refer to details provided in the testimony of Friends of Puna's Future (which I heartily agree with) regarding some specifics of the above.

Further, current county procurement and contracting policies and procedures do not necessarily support the most cost-effective use of taxpayer money for consultants, contractors and vendors. On this I speak from direct experience as a sole-proprietor contract service provider. I could provide taxpayers with more for less (as I do with commercial/corporate and non-profit clients) if county policy and procedure were not an obstacle to doing so.

In short there are countless examples of general lack of fiscal responsibility on the part of our county procurement, and numerous opportunities for appropriate cost reductions. Nonetheless our county officials consistently testify that they need "flexibility" and imply that a dedicated fund such as the 2% Land Preservation Fund would inhibit them. Your approval of CA-15 would allow voters to decide a simple budget matter. I would not call this "micro-managing," as some county officials have. I would call it checks and balances; I would call it appropriate and necessary public oversight of use of our tax dollars,

Further, CA-15, if passed, would specifically instruct the county as to an elevated priority. Without such instruction the county is most likely going to continue inefficient procurement practices that waste tens of millions of dollars a year. In this case, less "flexibility" means greater accountability, and greater accountability for government spending is clearly needed.

Returning to the 120% budget increase and 20% population increase of the past ten years, clearly there is considerable room for the county to re-prioritize and reduce costs. Yes, materials and supplies and other aspects of some CIP operations have gotten much more expensive in the past ten years. And - have they gotten more than 100% more expensive? When sound procurement procedures are used, that is?

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All commissioners ought to review the LAO (Legislative Auditor's Office) report on Capital Improvement Projects and cost overruns. While the national average for CIP cost overruns is approximately 15%, the figure for our county is 90%.

In this light, attacking the citizen-driven and citizen-mandated 2% Land Preservation Fund for "micromanaging" is absurd.

There appears to be obvious imbalance in presenting testimony at Charter Commission meetings. During testimony on CA-25 (CDPs) as well as testimony on CA-15, County officials were allowed unlimited access to the Charter Commission. The planning director went on at great length, presenting a variety of information without documentation or in the face of known facts or just plain irrelevant. Public testimony was limited to three minutes - for individuals as well as for organizations representing many individuals! There was no opportunity for citizens and citizens' groups to address "information" provided by county officials. Please recall that county government is a civil service institution. Their job (and yours) is to listen to citizens, not the other way around.

And, it must be remembered that the money involved is actually citizen-taxpayer money. We give it to the county to serve us, not to serve themselves and a select few others.

The original passage of the 2% Land Preservation Fund was a direct and unambiguous vote on spending priorities. It passed by a 63% vote in favor. If county budgets can rise 120% in ten years with only 20% population growth, voters can clearly expect, and deserve, priority for the 2% Land Preservation fund.

That the 2% Land Preservation Fund is before you now as a proposed charter amendment is primary evidence that citizen-taxpayers want to have the final say. The Charter Commission was established to provide citizens with voting opportunities to amend the basic principles or structure by which county government operates. Your job is to provide that voting opportunity for CA-15.

I urge you each and all to support CA-15 without reduction in the amount of the land fund amount.

I also urge those commissioners who voted against CA-25 (CDPs) to reconsider their vote and call for a revote. CA-25 deserves a vote by all commissioners, and prior to that a citizen rebuttal of unlimited testimony by county administrators that goes against the public support for it by citizens they allegedly serve.

Only one of you needs to call for a revote on CA-25. I urge you all to be that one.

Mahalo,
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