

HAWAII'S FUTURE

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"What lies ahead for the people of Hawaii?"

State and local governments will be far more important to Hawaii in the future than they are now. Attracting talented community-minded people to government will be crucial. I feel strongly about this.

Basic concerns. First, consider our wants. We want a Hawaii that preserves its aloha spirit of friendliness, sharing and love for the land. We want to protect and enhance our environment, to offer jobs, first-rate health care and education to all, to put a roof over everyone's head, and to treat our disadvantaged residents with compassion.

Second, consider what is happening to the ownership of Hawaii. More and more of it is owned "offshore," less and less by people who have the commitment that grows from knowing their children and grandchildren will grow up here.

Absentee ownership is not of itself bad. Outside capital has been basic to our growth, wealth and ever-increasing variety of choice. But future-shaping decisions made from afar may not always put Hawaii's best long-term interests first. To assure that these decisions are of our people, by our people and for our people, we will have to look more to our elected state and local governments.

Importance and role of government. I say this with something of a shudder. Government can let us down, too. That's why I stress the importance of attracting talented, community-minded people to it.

Government should encourage businesses that put in more than they take out, and that respect the above goals. Fortunately, we already have many good citizen businesses, some of them absentee-owned.

Conversely, government should discourage buccaneers and exploiters who lack respect for the general welfare.

This does not require bigger government, just better government. Government should set the rules of the game, but be less of a player than it is now. It is too big already. The collapse of socialism shows that government is no good at running economies. Might it not be equally bad at performing other services? The more services we can turn over to market-oriented private enterprises that play within the rules, the better.

Hawaii has some of the best and most affordable health care in America with a system based on private enterprise. We should carry this lesson into housing, schools of choice and numerous other services that could be leaner and more effective if privately run. We can do it if leaders emerge to articulate such goals. As voters we must scrutinize ever more closely those who want to help run our government, then choose the best. This becomes more important every day.

So how do we attract more talented, community-minded people to government? I'm not sure, but I have a few ideas.

More debates, less sign waving. Keep legislative and county council service part-time. That way we have a bigger talent pool to draw on. Let's not fear the legislator who goes back to a private job or megabucks business, or to a union to call a strike, maybe even against government. Let's trust the concept of representative government to see that these talented people contend in an open forum so that their best ideas can be exposed to and weighed by their colleagues and the public. Campaign debates are tough on candidates. They are especially risky for incumbents because they give exposure to lesser known rivals. However, they offer valuable insights into both issues and leadership qualities. We, the people, should demand more of them and less of simple, safe techniques like sign waving.

Constructive attitude. My colleagues in the media should have

more faith. We should report more of the good instead of pouncing mostly on the bad. But the public must support this by showing its interest in the good as well as the bad. I don't demean calls for more investigative reporting. We have a lot and more would be fine. But let's be specific in our criticisms and not demean all politics as "dirty." A key role of politics is to bring us together, sometimes across wide differences. It is a high art.

Expand horizons. One much-criticized perk of top-level government service is travel. We in the media tend to call trips "junkets". Our leaders need travel to broaden their knowledge and perspectives. By extending horizons such travel can be a good investment for us. It also can be an attraction to public service. However, we should peek over the shoulders of our travelers to see that they really work at their missions, thereby earning the right to a little play as well.

The 1992 legislative flap over first-class and personal-interest travel helped develop clearer rules. It also showed there is no generalized public resistance to travel if the purpose is deemed worthy. Both are pluses. A third plus might be to send media representatives along on more missions. They need broadening, too, and they could play a useful watchdog role.

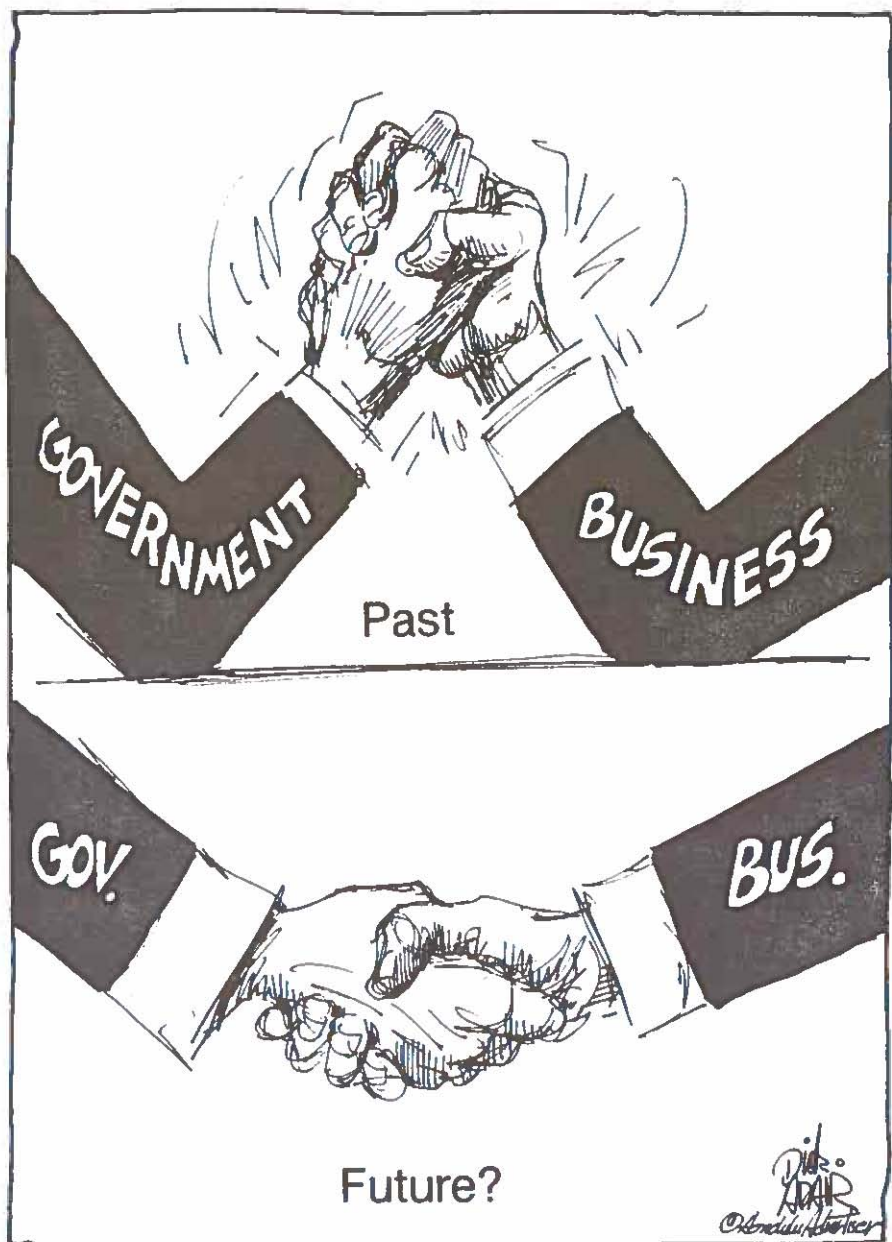
Elect leaders, not followers. Yes, we want ethical conduct. But let's not distrust our public servants to the point of making public service unattractive to people who can lead. Reasonable disclosure of private interests and open decision making should be our main emphasis.

Election from large multimember districts should be more widely employed. Small single-member districts provoke greater demand on incumbents for narrow-gauge spending and narrow-gauge thinking on area-wide concerns.

Appreciate business. It may surprise some to learn that most businesses do give back more than they take out. At a minimum they create jobs and pay taxes. Most do more.

The best of them are good corporate citizens. They volunteer money and personnel time to community causes. They protect the environment. They show social concern for their employees. They profit by filling a need. They reinvest big portions of their profits back so their business will grow for the future.

We would be in terrible shape without them. There are the "bad



guys," of course. Government can discourage them, setting standards to which they must conform in order to continue doing business in Hawaii.

Happy companies with happy employees are more the rule than the exception in Hawaii.

Important step. Do I really think we can shrink the size of government in the future? I do. I do. Read what other contributors to this book say about privatization. It's a trend nationwide. Governments are contracting out the management of hospitals, traffic control, highway maintenance, refuse collection, jails, even some police and fire services. In most of these cases governments are getting more bang for their buck.

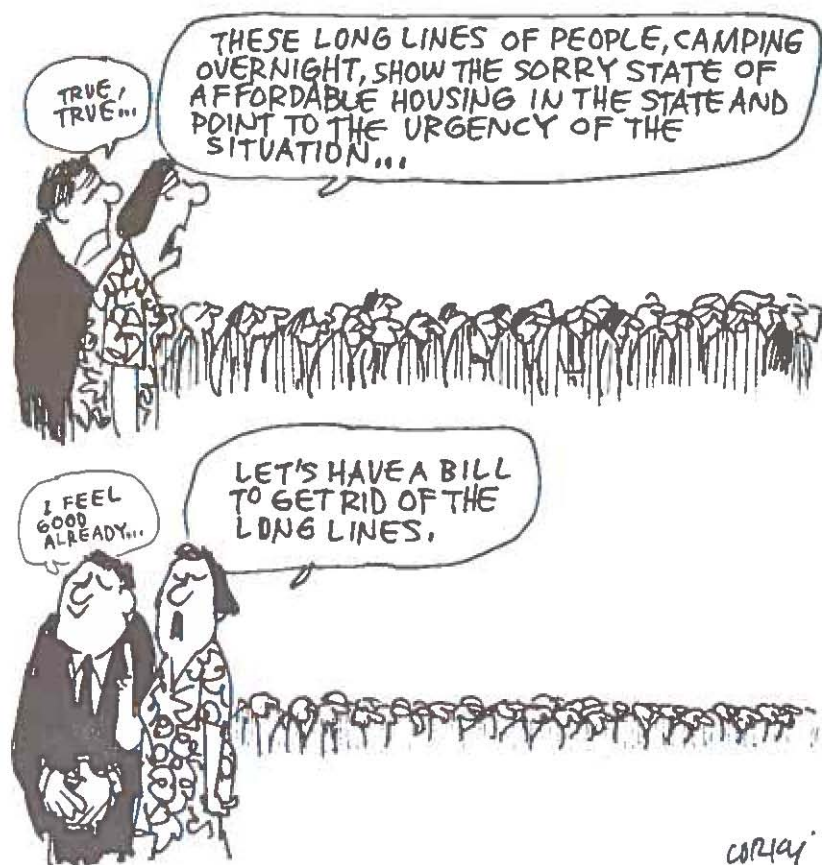
All too often bureaucrats fight to have more people under them because that's the road to higher pay classification. Turf battles ensue. For fear of being diminished they resist transferring underlings to more efficient employment in another branch. They fight for new positions, rarely recommend abolishing any. A lot of time and paperwork are wasted on these battles. Pretty soon branches of government have employees who must spend most of their time in committee meetings finding out what the others are doing. Many government employees have more incentive to protect themselves by never waiving a rule than to see that things get accomplished.

Private management has more flexibility to streamline its work force and reward employees for results rather than how many workers are under them.

We also should diminish government's regulatory role. It is ludicrous and cost-raising that we take about seven years to approve a new housing development because of the overlapping regulatory agencies involved. To break this regulatory grip will be to diminish the power of politicians and regulators. It won't be easy. But it must be done.

Political leadership. Occasionally I am asked what I think of present political leadership in Hawaii. I wish there were more of it—leadership, that is. I don't see enough leaders expressing clear visions for the future and winning others to rally round.

The pace of life is quickening due to computers, fax machines and other technological advances. The scope of our interest is broadening because of global television and communications. Our personal prob-



lems are becoming more complicated, partly because of urbanization. Instead of working out problems with our neighbors we turn more and more to legislators, government administrators and the courts to solve them for us. We are burying these people with workload and they are burying us with bureaucracy.

More and more we need leadership to help us cope—people who can meld the goals of all of us toward improving the common good. I mean true leaders, not demagogues who pander to lowest common denominators. Right now, both in Hawaii and nationally, we need strong leaders to identify workable ways to improve the lot of our troubled underclasses and rally support to implement effective programs. This is an area of uncertainty. But we start with the certainty that most of the old ways haven't worked.

Favorite examples. I have two favorite examples of the kind of leadership I mean. One was a Democrat. One was a Republican. Their philosophies differed. But each worked for the common good as he saw it. Each stated clear goals. What you saw was pretty much what you got. When they suffered political defeat—and both did—they didn't say: "Back to the drawing boards. I'll change my program to something more popular."

Instead they were inner-directed people with strong beliefs. Each must have said: "I lost, but I'm right. I won't change with the wind." The voters finally came around to them. They elected John A. Burns to be Governor of Hawaii and Ronald Reagan as President of the United States. You may agree or disagree with these men and their records. Reagan remains controversial. Even though he correctly called the U.S.S.R. an "evil empire," helped speed its dissolution and presided over a period of peace and prosperity, the pluses and minuses of his administration are still being evaluated. Whatever the final verdict, his agenda was clear and he was dedicated to doing the best for America as he saw it. I would welcome more leaders like both Ronald Reagan and John Burns. A debate between the two would have been in the best democratic tradition.