



HAWAII NEWS | VOLCANIC ASH

David Shapiro: Honolulu

Mayor Rick Blangiardi rides money train to big campaign fund payday

- By [David Shapiro](#), Special to the Star-Advertiser, Sunday, August 8, 2021.

For most of his term, Mayor Rick Blangiardi downplayed chances of building the \$12.5 billion Honolulu rail line all the way to Ala Moana Center, suggesting it was unrealistic with the project more than \$7 billion over its original budget and facing a current deficit of more than \$3 billion.

“These are very real economic factors, so this notion of how far can we take the rail, you know, building to Ala Moana is almost out of context with the reality that we’re in,” he told the Star-Advertiser’s Spotlight Hawaii in April.

But at last week’s meeting of the Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation, he was back on the script the powerful rail lobby has written for Honolulu mayors for 15 years.

“We have our eyes set on Ala Moana,” Blangiardi told rail directors.

One reason for the turnabout might be found in his latest campaign finance filing, in which he reported raising a whopping \$639,000 from January to June — the bulk from developers, construction firms and other rail interests.

Most of the money, \$465,000, went straight into the pockets of the mayor and his wife, to repay them for loans they made to his campaign.

Sweet deal. You run as the independent candidate, based in part on your large portion of self-financing, then after you’re elected the money you put up is paid back by the special interests you were supposedly independent from.

Much of Blangiardi's haul came from executives of construction and development firms such as the MacNaughton company, RM Towill, Royal Contracting, Nan Inc., Castle & Cooke, D.R. Horton, Dura Constructors, Avalon Development and the Kobayashi Group, some of which had multiple executives donating.

Prominent on the list were developers in Kakaako-Ala Moana, who have the highest stake in running the train through their projects to Ala Moana Center no matter the cost to taxpayers.

Honolulu Civil Beat reported that many of the donations came from two fundraisers for Blangiardi hosted by developer Stanford Carr with a suggested contribution of \$4,000, the maximum allowed by an individual. Stanford Carr has several condo projects in Kakaako.

I know, it's legal. It's how the game is played. Everybody does it.

But sugarcoat it as you may with the legalities written by the politicians who feed off the system, and it still has the look of legalized bribery.

Self-serving interests that can write \$4,000 campaign checks in batches get far more access and influence with elected leaders than we who merely write properly tax and income tax checks and pay the excise tax.

This inherent corruption is the main reason Hawaii's problems never get fixed and the politicians who don't fix them keep getting reelected.

Is it really too much to ask, as a matter of the most basic ethics, that elected officials in charge of spending public money don't take wads of cash to pay off personal loans from wealthy donors with selfish interests in how public money is spent?

Reach David Shapiro at volcanicash@gmail.com.