



6th District
HĀNA, EAST & UPCOUNTRY MAUI,
MOLOKA'I, LĀNA'I & KAHO'OLAWĒ

Chair, Committee on Energy,
Environment,
and International Affairs
Committee Memberships:
Intergovernmental Affairs;
Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs;
Media, Arts, Science, and Technology;
Water, Land, and Agriculture;
Ways and Means

Bissen Confirmed by Senate as Maui Judge



Bissen testifies at his hearing.

Former Maui County Prosecutor Richard Thomas Bissen, Jr. will begin a ten-year term as a Maui Circuit Court Judge, after a 24-1 confirmation vote by the Senate Floor on Feb. 15. The vote came after confirmation hearings by the Senate Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs Committee. In remarks on the Senate floor just before the confirmation vote, Judiciary Committee member Sen. J. Kalani English outlined the candidate's qualifications.

"Since his graduation from the William S. Richardson School of Law, Mr. Bissen has served as Interim Director of the Department of Public Safety, as first deputy attorney general for the state of Hawai'i, as a prosecuting attorney, and as an attorney in private practice. This kind of experience is very important to a judicial candidate. It means he knows the law and he knows how it is enforced. It means he knows the legal climate here in Hawai'i and has shown himself to be worthy."

"Mr. Bissen has been active in community service. He is a member of the Royal Order of Kamehameha's Kahekili Chapter, the Maui Drug Court Policy Committee, the Domestic Violence Clearinghouse Maui Advisory Committee, and numerous other organizations dedicated to improving the quality of life on Maui. The Maui County Bar Association honored him as its Lawyer of the Year in 2001."



The Senate Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs Committee conducted confirmation hearings on the Bissen nomination. Senator English is in the foreground.

"That tells me that he knows the issues that are important to the people of Hawai'i and he knows the Maui community"



A Message From Kalani

We're now a third of the way through the 2005 Legislative Session and, as always, our office is busy conducting hearings, gathering testimony for the Committee on Energy, the Environment, and International Affairs, monitoring the progress of bills we have introduced, and keeping up with the complex tasks of a legislator in Hawai'i. Each year, so much of the people's business is compressed into 60 working days.

As always, we want to use this newsletter as a way to encourage the people of the 6th District to take an active part in their government by sharing their concerns with us. We look forward to hearing from you.

Aloha,



This legislative session, Sen. English has introduced a number of bills regarding the safety of genetically modified organisms (GMO's) in food. An important component of Sen. English's responsibility as Chair of the Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment, and International Affairs is keeping informed about environmental issues and keeping lines of communication open with a variety of stakeholders. The following are perspectives in the ongoing debate from two experts in the field.



Dr. Lorrin Pang and Senator English confer in Sen. English's office at the State Capitol.

GMO's and the Threat of "Unintended Effects"

"We don't know what we don't know." Dr. Lorrin Pang, head of the State Department of Health's Maui branch, is speaking today as a private citizen who can draw upon years of study of food safety issues. He's describing the current state of our knowledge about genetically modified organisms. "The key issue," he says, "is unintended effects." He cites numerous examples of materials that have gone into widespread use and later were found to be dangerous: lead in water pipes and paint, asbestos, Vioxx, and ephedrine, among others.

Dr. Pang's particular concern is unintended effects on health, ecology, and agriculture. "This is typical of new products, such as drugs and vaccines, when they come out... There are two camps – one that thinks we can predict on the basis of theory, and the other camp, to which I belong, that uses past experience to say we cannot predict what will happen. The second camp says 'we don't put much faith in you and your theories, especially as they react with people and the environment.'"

The heart of Dr. Pang's argument is what scientists call "the precautionary principle," which a 1998 conference of environmentalists defined as follows: "When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically."

"Mistakes are irreversible. Test for unintended effects, that's what I ask."

That approach was echoed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1998 at the second Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators. At that conference, WHO assistant director-general Kerstin Leitner said, "At this point, we have no evidence to say that it is dangerous to consume food products that contain GMOs, but at the same time we also don't know its negative side. So, we have to say that we do not know the adverse health effects of GM food."

Dr. Pang adds that he's "not really against [GMO's]," but makes the point that "Mistakes are irreversible. Test for unintended effects, that's what I ask."



Andrew Hashimoto is Dean and Director of the UH College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, whose stated mission is to “actively help Hawaii diversify its economy, ensure a sustainable environment, and strengthen its communities, as the premier resource for tropical agricultural systems and natural resource management in the Asia-Pacific region.”

**Links to Further Reading
on Biotechnology**

- UH College of Tropical Agriculture
www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/ctahr2001/
- Hawai'i Organic Farmers Association
www.hawaiiorganicfarmers.org/
- GMO Free Hawaii
<http://www.higean.org/>
- Hawai'i Agriculture Research Center
<http://www.hawaiiag.org/harc/>

Biotechnology in Agriculture - Are the Risks Under Control?

Andrew Hashimoto, Dean of the University of Hawai'i's College of Tropical Agriculture, is well aware of the ongoing concerns about GMO technology, but believes the risks are under control. "This is very powerful technology; it could do good or bad things – and we need controls in place to monitor it," he says. "But it's important that we don't lose sight of its potential."

That potential, Hashimoto says, includes "the opportunity to take the genetic makeup of a species and make it disease resistant." That could lead to the development of crops that are resistant to drought, tolerant of salt water, or resistant to insect pests. And in a world that's rapidly running out of food, that kind of technology could be too valuable to ignore.

"There's a lot more that needs to be understood to produce foods that are healthy, nutritious, and safe," Hashimoto adds. But the effort is needed, he says, because worldwide demand for food is increasing as the amount of arable land is diminishing. With an eye toward the future, the College of Tropical Agriculture works with farmers to increase yields and diversify crops, because "our current food policy is not sustainable. At some point we will need to make food production more efficient on

limited land." The problem is especially acute in Hawai'i because of our geographical isolation. Hashimoto points out that the costs of food, energy, and water are all rising, and says it's only a matter of time before these rising costs converge and reach crisis proportions.

**Dean Hashimoto says
Hawai'i's papaya industry**



**"would not be here"
if not for the development
of the transgenic papaya
through biotechnology.**

"We need a good policy to look at the risks" of biotechnology, Hashimoto says, but he's confident that the systems in place up to now have been effective. Federal regulations call for permits to be issued at key steps in the biotechnology process. "When we come from the lab to the greenhouse, we need permits... on a case-by-case basis... The process works; we need to be sure to allow it to work."

Dean Hashimoto cites the introduction of the transgenic papaya a decade ago as a biotechnology success story. Hawai'i's papaya crop had been all but destroyed by the papaya ringspot virus before a disease-resistant strain was developed. "Our feeling—this is a tool that can be used, and we need a lot of tools. We have to be cautious,

but if you push [the precautionary principle] too far we wouldn't do anything, because don't know what the results will be."

Kaho'olawe a Place of "Hope and Inspiration"

Over the Presidents' Day weekend, some 40 volunteers traveled to Kaho'olawe in a trip facilitated by the **Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana**. The 45-square-mile former "Target Island" became a flashpoint for Native Hawaiian activists in the 1970's. Among the volunteers was **Jennifer Chow**, Office Manager for Sen. J. Kalani English, who brought back this first-person account of the experience.

As we approached the island of Kaho'olawe by boat, then by Zodiac, and finally by swimming to shore, I was filled with anticipation. I don't often get the chance to experience a place that most people only hear about, and what I found on Kaho'olawe was so much more than all of the stories combined.

The **Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana** (PKO) is an informal organization that spearheaded the efforts in the late 1970's to stop the bombing by the U.S. Navy that had gone on for decades. Although the island is currently held in trust and managed by the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission (KIRC), a state agency created by the Legislature. PKO was given the role of steward of the island, and has been legally taking groups to Kaho'olawe since 1980. One of the only ways for people to visit the island is through monthly trips organized by PKO. I was invited to go with a group called Envision Hawaii and thought it would be a perfect opportunity to visit and learn more about the most remote and isolated part of the 6th District.

All over the island are reminders of the devastation that Kaho'olawe withstood over the years. From the orange signposts that decorate the landscape and show the various tiers of danger, to the arid desert-like climate and solid red hardpan caused by years of deforestation and erosion, to the plaques in memory of the two PKO members lost at sea during the early days of the struggle, the visitor is constantly reminded of the history that Kaho'olawe represents.

What is perhaps more striking, however, are the signs of hope and inspiration that the island embodies. This is a place that is full of cultural, spiritual, and educational significance for Native Hawaiians, and reminders are everywhere. Being on Kaho'olawe gave me a heightened awareness of the footsteps of those that came before us and a profound respect for the work that KIRC, PKO, and members of the community are doing to restore the natural and cultural resources of the island. The amount accomplished in a very short period of time is a testament to the power of individuals coming together for a common cause.



Members of the **Envision Hawaii** group: from left to right in back, Brent Dillabaugh, Callie (from Chicago), Kilikina Mahi, Jenn Chow; middle, Alani Apio, Kristine Yoo, Wei Fang, Anne-Marie Beck, Alison Machida, Nalani Fujimori; in front, Sergio Goes

*The **Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana's** mission is "to perpetuate Aloha 'Aina throughout our islands through cultural, educational and spiritual activities that heal and revitalize the cultural and natural resources on Kaho'olawe."*

You can learn more at
www.kahoolawe.org

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