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CAPITOL CONNECTION

APRIL 2021

From the governor: Hopeful signs after a long, hard year

No doubt about it – it’s been a tough year for Hawai’i and everywhere else in the world. But with our COVID-19 precautions, more people getting vaccinated and the American Rescue Plan on the way, the future is looking brighter. So what will the future look like in a Hawai’i 2.0 economy? The answers to those questions are driving some statewide initiatives to connect people to new opportunities and create a vision for Hawai’i beyond sand and surf.

Q. What is the outlook for opening vaccinations to more people?

A. We’re very encouraged by the community response to all three vaccines — Pfizer, Moderna and now Johnson & Johnson. The Department of Health has begun vaccinating people **60 and older**, those with high-risk medical conditions, and more essential workers in the Phase 1c group. We have over 100 sites helping us administer the shots so we can get more people vaccinated as soon as we get more doses.

Q. Why is it still important to take precautions, even if you’ve been vaccinated?

A. While the Centers for Disease Control has issued guidance for people who are two weeks past their final shot, they are still encouraging everyone to take precautions, especially with the increase in variants. The advice is people should still distance and wear masks, unless they’re with other fully vaccinated people or with members of a single household at low risk for severe disease. With the number of COVID-19 cases increasing, we can’t let down our guard.

Q. Are plans under way for fully vaccinated travelers to have a “vaccine passport”?

A. I’m in discussions with the White House, along with the other governors, about making a national vaccination passport a priority. In the meantime, Hawai’i is working on a pilot project in cooperation with **CommonPass**, a health information platform, that can access a wide variety of test facilities across the country to validate tests and vaccinations. They have a network of over 30,000 labs that could implement the guidelines to expand our Safe Travels program for trusted testing partners.

Q. Are you and the mayors considering some changes to the Safe Travels program and interisland quarantine?

A. We want case counts on all the islands to decline before we consider lifting the interisland quarantine and pre-travel testing, but we’re glad that Kaua’i is rejoining the Safe Travels program. Trans-Pacific travelers would still need a negative COVID-19 test result to bypass the state’s mandatory quarantine. We’re being careful because it doesn’t take much for cases to spike.



Dr. Libby Char with Governor and Mrs. Ige after their vaccinations.



Q. How will Hawai’i benefit from the \$1.9 trillion federal American Rescue Plan?

A. The good news is the direct aid to states is significant so we don’t have to implement furloughs or layoffs. The funds for Hawai’i include \$1.6 billion to help meet the state’s budget shortfall, payments to individuals and families, \$300 weekly unemployment benefit extensions as well as funds to help schools, rent and mortgage relief, support for small businesses and nonprofits, vaccine distribution, Native Hawaiian programs and increased SNAP, childcare and Medicaid benefits.

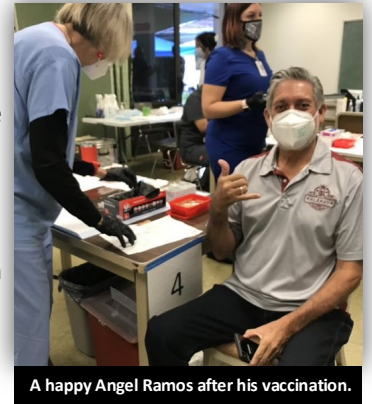
Q. What do you want people to know as you look back on the past year and forward to the future?

A. At first, the hardest part was taking actions that affected so many people when we didn’t have much science and not knowing who was most at risk. We knew businesses would be hurting and people would be unemployed, but we always put people’s health and safety first. We say in a crisis Hawai’i’s people come together, and they have. When we implemented restrictions, people listened, so our COVID cases came down to the point that we still have the lowest infection and mortality rates in the nation.

One and done: Johnson & Johnson vaccines arrive

The shaka from Kalākaua Middle School vice principal Angel Ramos said it all. He was the first among several hundred Department of Education employees who registered for the initial round of Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccine March 5 at the Windward Comprehensive Health Center. “The invitation had links for people to sign up for this clinic today or for a Moderna clinic here next week,” said Dr. Amy Curtis, DOH adult mental health division administrator. “We had almost 500 people sign up for Johnson & Johnson in a day and a half. We’re glad there is so much interest.”

Ramos said of his decision, “I watched (Dr. Anthony Fauci) on TV. He said that all three (Johnson & Johnson, Moderna and Pfizer vaccines) are good. So I didn’t hesitate to take it.” Johnson & Johnson vaccines have been shipped to O’ahu, Hawai’i, Maui and Kaua’i. Shots will be administered at points of dispensing run by the state’s district health offices and by various hospitals. DOH will announce additional details soon about where and when the vaccine will be available.



VACCINATIONS FOR PHASE 1C UNDER WAY—With more vaccine shipments on the way, the state Department of Health has started vaccinating **Hawai’i residents age 60 and older as well as people in Phase 1c**, which includes those with high-risk medical conditions (ages 16 to 64) and essential workers not already vaccinated. Health Director Dr. Libby Char said, “This is another huge step in our effort to protect Hawai’i residents from COVID-19. There are about half a million people in Phase 1c, so it’s going to take us a while to get to everyone, but we’re well on our way.” To stay updated on the registration for appointments, go to <https://hawaii-covid19.com/vaccination-registration/>. Also, **O’ahu kūpuna can now call 2-1-1 daily** from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. for help with appointments and transportation.

Critical help for businesses and the unemployed



The Ige administration and the state Legislature worked together to provide relief for businesses hard hit by the pandemic and facing higher payments into the state fund that covers unemployment insurance claims. **HB 1278 HD1** caps the employer contribution tax rate at a lower “Schedule D” level for 2021 and 2022.

“Temporarily reducing unemployment insurance tax rates will contain the economic fallout from COVID-19 and expedite the state’s economic recovery,” said the governor. “I signed HB 1278 to protect employers from higher tax rates at a time when they can least afford it. The measure allows employers to pay, on average, less than half of what they would otherwise pay into the system. The bill needed to be fast-tracked to head off a scheduled March 6 rate increase for employers. Ross Anderson, owner of Waioli Kitchen and Bake Shop, added, “The clock was ticking for small businesses, and we were all holding our collective breath. You came together and acted decisively to make it happen.”

To make it easier for those who are unemployed to get through to the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) call center, a new system to block auto-dialers has been installed. “We’ll be calling back those who can’t get through because the call center automatically logs incoming calls, whether they are answered or not,” said DLIR director Anne Perreira-Eustaquio. “Our biggest concern is claimants not picking up their phones when we call.” Under the new system, people can respond to a specific choice of options, including regular unemployment, PUA, reporting fraud, or whether you are an employer calling about employee-related matters. The local numbers for the call center are 762-5751 and 762-5752. The toll-free numbers are 833-901-2272 or 833-901-2275.

\$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan to benefit many

Hawai’i’s share of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan signed by President Joe Biden provides a major infusion of federal funding at a time when the state and its residents need it the most. “This gives us much-needed breathing room so that **layoffs and furloughs aren’t necessary in the foreseeable future**,” said Governor Ige. The legislation means that the State of Hawai’i and the four counties will receive about \$2.2 billion in assistance to bolster state and county budgets and more funds for healthcare, education and other critical needs.



The relief package extends unemployment benefits of \$300 a week through Sept. 6 and provides direct payments to qualified single taxpayers and married couples and dependents. In addition, it provides additional funding for education — both the Department of Education and the University of Hawaii, SNAP, childcare and Medicaid programs, rental and mortgage assistance, COVID-19 response such as vaccinations, public health programs, small businesses and non-profits, Native Hawaiian education, and transportation. The breakdown includes \$1.6 billion for the State of Hawai’i; \$365 million for the City and County of Honolulu; \$36 million for the County of Hawai’i; \$13 million for the County of Kaua’i; and \$30 million for the County of Maui. The state will also receive an additional \$116 million for critical capital projects for pandemic response, education and healthcare. More details on fund distribution will be provided in the coming weeks as the state receives guidance from the federal government.

Hawai'i's creative industry charts 2.0 path to the future

While some of us have been home binge-watching, Hawai'i's creative industry has embarked on a quiet revolution. From film, media, and music to visual, cultural and performing arts — those in the business have had to pivot to new digital platforms in the pandemic to survive. The result is a local creative industry that is finding new ways to generate jobs, revenue and market itself to the world. **Why is this a critical time for creative industries to grow locally?** "It's one of the bright spots in the pandemic that Hawai'i can build a long-term strategy from," said Georja Skinner, head of the Creative Industries Division (CID) in the state's Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism. "There's no better time to beat Hawai'i's drum about the power of our state's creative and innovation economies. That means broadening the economic driver that the creative clusters represent."

Skinner said the pandemic has galvanized the local creative industry to band together in new ways and support each other. "Music, culture and the performing arts are the heart and soul of Hawai'i," she said. "But our artists have been turning to YouTube and online platforms like Facebook Live because there was no income from gigs. All the performing venues went dark. Now we've formed a **Hawai'i Creative Leadership Hui** to explore ways to digitally export and support performing artists in the state through a one-hub, web portal. We want to showcase the best of Hawai'i's artistic content to the world." This global vision has been part of CID's strategy for a while, but the pandemic has created new opportunities in a Hawai'i 2.0 economy. "It's helped make the islands even more attractive for productions because of our low COVID-19 case counts and safety guidelines, as well as state and county film office support," she noted. "Hawaii Five-O" paved the way for the current "Magnum, P.I." and now "Doogie Kamealoha, M.D." — all creating jobs for local talent.

In addition, a growing number of Hawai'i-produced films are garnering national and international attention. Among them is "Kapaemahu," the first Hawai'i production named a possible Oscar nominee for "Best Animated Short." The film tells the ancient story of dual male and female Native Hawaiian spirits who imbued their healing powers in four giant stones that still stand in Waikiki. "This film is a culmination of what Hawai'i should be in the minds of people around the world," said Skinner. "It says this is a place where we celebrate diversity and the indigenous wisdom and ingenuity the world needs right now. What better way to do that than through storytelling?"

People hunkered down at home have also created a huge demand for online creative content, which Hawai'i can help fill. CID's Creative Labs, along with the UH system's Academy of Creative Media and non-profit, private sector programs, have become the training ground for new local talent and connecting them to jobs and markets for their intellectual property. **The goal? To help kama'aina carve out careers in the industry and still live in Hawai'i.** One recent Creative Lab success story involves two local singer-songwriters who composed the song "Keep You Safe" that has been licensed for use by a national healthcare provider and was featured in six different TV series, including "Grey's Anatomy." Another is a Hawai'i island kama'aina mentored in a screenwriting Creative Lab who has had her scripts produced for the Lifetime movie channel. Skinner said locally produced films and other creative products represent the best of what Hawai'i has to offer in talent and story narratives with universal appeal. Whether it's music from our Hawaiian heritage or stories that reflect island culture and values, Skinner believes Hawai'i has much to offer the world through creative media. "The pride in the talent of Hawai'i has always been here, but there's so much more potential for global recognition, distribution and awareness now." For more on CID free public panels, workshops and resources, go to <https://cid.hawaii.gov/>.

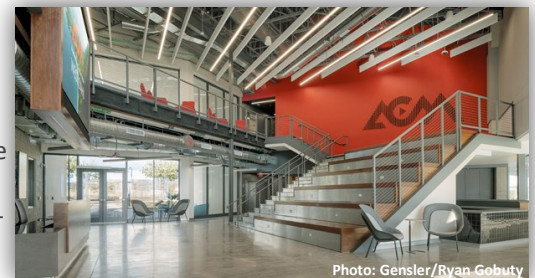
New ACM facility ready for debut

The "wow" factor is just the beginning when you step through the doors of the new Academy of Creative Media facility at UH West O'ahu. The state-of-the-art, \$37 million building will link creative media programs for students throughout the UH system and provide a high-tech training hub for high-demand careers. UH West O'ahu's bachelor's of arts in creative media embraces digital media literacy and storytelling through video, animation, video games, design, social media, web and app development, virtual and augmented reality, and other areas.

Currently, it's the fastest-growing major on campus with Native Hawaiians making up 28 percent of the student body in the ACM program. Academy director Sharla Hanaoka said the program's state-of-the-art equipment will provide "hands-on experiences" to prepare students for the industry, but the training goes beyond technology to classes in leadership, creative writing and history. "Technology changes, but how to tell a story and think outside the box are perennial skills our graduates need," she added. In a Honolulu Star-Advertiser interview, UH system ACM founder Chris Lee said the goal is to give local youths from diverse backgrounds a way to pursue their digital dreams without having to leave Hawai'i. "There's nothing on the mainland kids can't have here now," he said.



(top) Team members in the new ID8 Studios, a public/private partnership between HTDC, Bizgenics Foundation and DBEDT. (below) A scene from the acclaimed animated short "Kapaemahu," produced in Hawai'i.



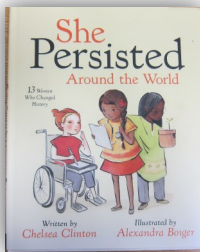
The new ACM UH-West O'ahu facility will link students statewide.

Celebrating the contributions of women worldwide

"We do not need magic to transform our world; we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already." — J.K. Rowling

Every year when the world celebrates **International Women's Day** in March, we're reminded of courageous women — past and present — who have made a difference in the world. From Hawai'i's own Queen Lili'uokalani and other historic figures to pandemic caregivers and strong members of our own 'ohana, the message to the next generation of girls is clear: Persist. Don't give up your dreams.

First Lady Dawn Amano-Ige co-hosted a March 8 webinar with Australian Consul-General to Honolulu Jane Hardy, honoring women frontline medical workers and health care leaders who have helped the state through the pandemic, including State Health Director Dr. Libby Char, deputy director Cathy Ross, and Queen's CEO Dr. Jill Hoggard Green. As for her own family, Mrs. Ige said she and the governor treated their children — two daughters and a son — the same way, focusing on their interests and strengths. "Both our daughters are very independent and determined so gender was never a barrier growing up," she said. (Amy is a registered nurse and Lauren is an attorney.) "There are many women before them who have helped pave the way for the next generation."



Mrs. Ige's current book choice for "Conversations with the First Lady" on 'Ōlelo Channel 53 is "**She Persisted Around the World**" by Chelsea Clinton with illustrations by Alexandra Boiger. "It reflects the power we can all have to fulfill our dreams," said Mrs. Ige. "None of the women in the book had an easy journey. Yet they persisted because they stayed focused on their goals. When I speak to students, I urge them to find their passion because that will carry them through the difficult times." The March show will air again on April 4, 11 and 18 at 5:30 p.m. As for her own careers in public relations and education, she said, "I had some wonderful women mentors who paved the path for me. My advice to young girls is to let your support system help you to find the power within yourself. Whatever you choose to do will be of value to yourself and our community."

Connecting to jobs through Hawai'i Remote Work

What if you could find work anywhere in the world and still live in Hawai'i? A statewide program to help unemployed residents do just that has been launched, with more opportunities being planned through state and county partnerships. The goal of the **Hawai'i Remote Work Pilot Project** is to help residents find new career paths and still make their home in the islands. "Remote work for local residents is one important way we can keep families together here in Hawai'i and stop the export of our talent," said Leslie Wilkins, chair of the state's Workforce Development Council (WDC). "Connecting our residents to global employment possibilities is a way to open doors to economic resiliency."



The "**Remote Ready Hawai'i**" program provides unemployed residents intensive training as a remote business development representative or a remote customer service professional, a paid remote internship, and job placement assistance after course and internship completion through Instant Teams. The initiative is a partnership between the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism and the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations through **WDC and the American Job Centers in each of the state's counties**. For more details, email james.k.souza@hawaii.gov or call 586-9285.

Another initiative already under way is an **Amazon Web Services (AWS)** training and certification boot camp offered through the **Pacific Center for Advanced Technology Training (PCATT)** at Honolulu Community College. According to the state's broadband strategy officer Burt Lum, "Broadband is the foundation upon which all the new digital applications are delivered, and much of this resides in the cloud. AWS is a key technology in this cloud system. The AWS Cloud certification helps to build that expertise." HCC chancellor Karen Lee added, "This initial AWS training is an excellent example of a public-private workforce training partnership that's needed within our state. We're thankful to the Broadband Hui for approaching us with this opportunity to train students with the latest, industry-recognized IT and cloud computing skills." For more details on future courses, go to <https://pcatt.org/> and click on "cloud computing."

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