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CAPITOL CONNECTION

JULY 2022

From the governor: Making democracy work in tough times

Judging by the headlines, our democratic system is under siege from all sides. From civil rights and gun safety to the Jan. 6 attack on our nation's Capitol, the political divide hasn't left much room for civil discourse. But in Hawai'i we've found ways to work together as a community — whether it's surviving the pandemic or passing legislation to make progress. This issue of Capitol Connection highlights several bills Governor Ige recently signed into law and why they matter.

Q. What should we know about the current levels of COVID-19 in Hawai'i and what concerns you most?

A. I'm proud that Hawai'i was recently ranked first in the nation for its management of the pandemic, according to the Commonwealth Fund. Although current case counts remain high, we're also encouraged by some recent downward trends. And now we have COVID-19 vaccines for keiki under age five. On the regular calls we governors have with the White House, our biggest concern is that, without more federal support, the states will have a harder time getting access to free testing and new drug treatments and vaccinations. Unless the federal government commits to purchasing supplies, the manufacturers won't ramp up production until they can justify it economically.

Q. What's the most challenging part of the bill review process? Is there anything different this year?

A. As governor, I have **only three options**: sign the bill into law, veto it or let it become law without my signature. The measures I veto may have some merit but could be legally flawed or may just not be good policy. If it becomes law without my signature, that means I might disagree with parts of the measure, but they're not so egregious that I would veto the whole bill. This is the first session since the state Supreme Court's ruling struck down the legislature's use of "gut and replace" for bills, so that has made our review more complicated. I may support the content of a bill, but clearly, if we know it was a "gut and replace," it's hard to ignore that.

Q. What's the significance of the bills you've already signed, especially for communities and families?

A. We know the pandemic has left many people struggling financially. The bills for tax rebates, increasing the minimum wage and making the earned income tax credit permanent and refundable will help many people. Other bills I've signed in the last month reaffirm that in Hawai'i we believe everyone deserves respect, and that respect extends to all our people as well as our land and culture. Whether it's gun safety, sustainability, equity issues or student rights and responsibilities, these laws send important messages about what we value as a community and how we intend to uphold those values.

Q. What have you found most disturbing in the hearing coverage of the Jan. 6 Capitol attack?

A. I've found it disturbing that a former president of the United States could continue to indiscriminately promote the lie that the election was "stolen" when his own advisors told him those claims were baseless. Even William Barr, his former attorney general, described Mr. Trump as being "detached from reality." What's even scarier is that many people, including Republican members of Congress, still support him in that narrative.

Q. Why was Title IX so important for gender equity? Have you sought gender balance in your cabinet and other appointments?

A. There's no denying Title IX, co-authored by Hawai'i Congresswoman Patsy Mink, has helped women and girls tremendously in sports and other areas of education and created opportunities that didn't exist before. My daughters have benefited from that, although I know there are still biases in our society. It's harder for anyone to be a public servant today, but as governor I wanted to have the different perspectives women can bring to the table. We were committed to appointing the best, most qualified people to serve in the cabinet and other appointed positions. In many cases, the most qualified were women.



Moms Demand Gun Action joined Governor Ige at HB 2075 bill signing.



Debate on Jan. 6 attack continues.

Safeguarding aquatic resources, creating green jobs

Hawai'i's ocean and land resources will be better protected, thanks to legislation passed this session and signed by the governor June 8, **World Oceans Day**. "These bills support my administration's commitment to effectively manage the state's nearshore waters," said Governor Ige, with 30% established as marine management areas by the year 2030. **The bills include:** **SB 3330** - Authorizes a three-year pilot program to assess the threats to marine life in the Pupukeya Marine Life Conservation District; **HB 1653** - Establishes a tiered fine system for aquatic life that is taken, killed or injured; **SB 2767** - Provides funds for fish aggregation devices used as an important resource for sustainable fisheries; **SB 204** - Authorizes the use of in-lieu fee mitigation to preserve aquatic habitats.



Bills for ocean protection and a green jobs youth corps were signed.

Both the governor and Suzanne Case, Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) director, thanked lawmakers for addressing the threats facing the environment because of climate change. "We all know how critical our ocean waters are to life in Hawai'i," Case said. "While there's still much work to accomplish, these laws will help Hawai'i get closer to its overall goals." The governor also signed a fifth bill to establish a **green jobs youth corps**. **SB 2768** directs DLNR to administer a program of training opportunities in natural resource management, agriculture and other sustainability-related professions for young adults ages 26 and younger. He recognized the non-profit Kupu for the 'āina-based internships it's provided to young people over the years, including many who work in DLNR.

Bill signed to name 'ōhi'a lehua as state endemic tree



Student support led to a bill recognizing the importance of 'ōhi'a lehua.

The earnest efforts by hundreds of school children, their teachers, state lawmakers, and conservationists resulted in Governor Ige signing **SB 2059** into law during a Washington Place ceremony. The measure designates 'ōhi'a lehua as the official Hawai'i State Endemic Tree. 'Ōhi'a is the most common native tree in our forests — from the lower elevations to the highest peaks — covering close to one million acres of land statewide.

Governor Ige told the invited guests, including 30 keiki, that it was their powerful voices that helped bring this designation into law. "They are among those who, in the future, will help ensure our 'ōhi'a-dominated forests survive and thrive for all generations," he said. The governor stressed the importance of the designation, saying, **"'Ōhi'a lehua is a symbol of Hawai'i**. As a keystone species, it makes up fully 80% of our native forests. Unfortunately, Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death has killed more than a million 'ōhi'a trees on Hawai'i Island alone

over the past eight years. Providing this recognition will help spread the message about how important this species has been, and will continue to be, to life in Hawai'i." The bill signing concluded with the ceremonial planting of a young 'ōhi'a tree on the grounds of Washington Place, with students from Waimānalo and Mānoa Elementary participating, along with the governor, Mrs. Ige and legislators.

Keeping Hawai'i protected through gun safety laws

Gun violence prevention has never been more urgent in the United States than it is right now. With the signing of **HB2075**, Governor Ige underscored that point by restoring part of a previous gun law struck down by a federal court last year. **"Hawai'i has one of the lowest rates of gun violence in America, and this new law is key in helping law enforcement keep our communities safe,"** he said. The new law requires the physical, in-person inspection of three categories of firearms identified by county police chiefs as top threats to public safety. They include guns that do not have serial numbers (also known as ghost guns); guns brought to Hawai'i from out of state; and guns transferred between private individuals



Legislators and the governor worked together to maintain gun safety provisions.

Among the state's strict gun laws is one that requires people who buy guns to obtain a license and complete a firearm safety course. Since Governor Ige took office, Hawai'i has enacted new gun safety legislation that includes the "Extreme Risk Law," which allows individuals to petition a court to disarm a person in a crisis. Another law alerts law enforcement officials when anyone who is prohibited from owning a firearm attempts to obtain a gun. And in 2020, Hawai'i joined other states in prohibiting ghost guns and the manufacture or purchase of parts for the purpose of assembling a ghost gun.

Tax rebates, minimum wage hike, other help on the way

Hawai'i residents hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic will get some welcome relief from two bills Governor Ige signed June 22. **SB 514** would give a **tax refund of \$300 per person to filers who earn less than \$100,000 a year and \$100 per person to tax filers who earn more than \$100,000 a year.** The rebates would also apply for each dependent. The governor had proposed a rebate for all taxpayers and their dependents in his 2022 State of the State address, and legislators increased the amounts when state tax collections proved to be even more robust than expected. The Department of Taxation anticipates it will begin issuing the rebates the last week of August. The majority of the payments will be sent out by the end of October.



Legislators and community advocates gather for the bill signings by the governor.

The governor also signed **HB 2510**, which will **raise the current state minimum wage of \$10.10 to \$12 this October and \$18 per hour by 2028.** The same bill also extends and makes permanent the **Earned Income Tax Credit** to help Hawai'i's working families. "All of us understand that the high cost of living is a burden for many in our community," said the governor. "We know people continue to struggle in the wake of the pandemic. Thanks to the legislative leadership of Senate President Ron Kouchi, Speaker Saiki, Sen. Brian Taniguchi and Rep. Sylvia Luke, these two bills will put more money in the pockets of those who need it the most. This means consumers will have more money to support our local businesses and our economy for the benefit of everyone."

Bill addresses 'period poverty' for public, charter school students



Governor and Mrs. Ige with students, legislators and advocates for SB 2821.

Inequity comes in many forms — some obvious, others not so much, and known only to those who suffer in silence. "**Period poverty**" or the inability to access menstrual products is one such issue that can present challenges for young students who are homeless or are in low-income households, individuals who identify as non-binary or transgender, or those who have a history of involvement with the justice system.

Governor Ige has signed into law SB 2821 that addresses this inequity and requires the state Department of Education and the State Public Charter School Commission to provide menstrual products free of charge to their students. A 2021 pilot project by Ma'i Movement Hawai'i found that 8 out of 10 students had difficulties accessing menstrual products in school, indicating embarrassment, cost and education as major barriers. "Period poverty is a real issue for young people and can be a barrier to their right to a meaningful education," said the governor. He also thanked Sen. Michelle Kidani, Senate President Ron Kouchi and Rep. Della Au Belatti as well as the many young people who he said were "instrumental" in the passage of bill.

Supporting the LGBTQ+ community to prevent discrimination

Governor Ige has signed three bills that support the LGBTQ+ community on a multitude of levels. The bills are **HB 2405**, which prohibits insurance providers from excluding gender affirming treatments when they are medically necessary; **SB 2136**, which ensures that gender identity or expression can't be a reason for excluding a citizen from jury service; and **SB 2670**, which establishes the Hawai'i state Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus Commission on a permanent basis.

The event took place at Bishop Museum, which is hosting a special exhibit and documentary, "**The Healer Stones of Kapemahu.**" The film and exhibition explore the past and contemporary meanings of four large stones that were long ago placed on Waikiki Beach to honor four mahu, extraordinary individuals of dual male and female spirit, who brought healing arts from Tahiti to Hawai'i. The exhibit will be on view at Bishop Museum through Oct. 23, 2022.

"This exhibit explores our past and highlights the fact that native Hawaiians held a special, respected place for citizens of dual



Governor Ige, legislators and LGBTQ+ community supporters gather at Bishop Museum.

identities," said the governor. "We are here today, not only to acknowledge that rich history, but also to signify we're moving forward, restoring our efforts to be a more inclusive community."

Sen. Chris Lee and Rep. Adrian Tam both spoke of the need for Hawai'i to set a positive example at a time when some other states have passed laws vilifying LGBTQ+ youth and their parents. Lee said, "This is about rejecting the politics of division and discrimination and reaffirming for Hawai'i that everyone deserves the same respect and aloha." Tam added, "My hope is that we send a strong message to our youth that Hawai'i stands with them and that we love them."

‘Seamless Summer’ and ‘Oceans of Possibilities’

Schools may be on break, but options for families abound — whether it’s access to nutritious meals, storytimes, or tips on activities right in our own backyards. First Lady Dawn Amano Ige wanted to recognize Gavin Tsue, principal at Palisades Elementary School, for implementing a Jump Start Breakfast option in one of his classrooms. She had introduced the breakfast initiative prior to the pandemic as a way to encourage a nutritious start to a student’s day. “When children are hungry, they can’t learn,” said Mrs. Ige. The state Department of Education has taken that message to heart and is offering free summer meals through its **“Seamless Summer Option”** to children age 18 and younger at 83 schools statewide. Parents should call their nearest school directly for details.



For the summer, Mrs. Ige is also resuming her monthly storytime series. For July, she’ll be featuring acclaimed author **Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s recent children’s book, “Snow Angel, Sand Angel.”** The story describes a little girl named Claire, growing up on Hawai’i island, who has never seen snow. “It takes the reader through beautifully illustrated scenes, from Mauna Kea to Hāpuna Beach, where Lois-Ann grew up,” said Mrs. Ige. “Claire learns to appreciate the endangered plants and animals and the importance of taking care of the places where we live.” To see all of Mrs. Ige’s storytime videos, go to the <https://governor.hawaii.gov/meet-the-first-lady>.

The First Lady also wanted to remind everyone about this year’s **summer reading challenge called “Oceans of Possibilities.”** The **Hawai’i State Library system’s** challenge, which runs through July 30, includes weekly ocean-themed activity packets for children, in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Prizes are available for readers of all ages and there’s a grand prize drawing for four round-trip tickets to anywhere Alaska Airlines flies. For details, go to <http://librarieshawaii.beanstack.org/>.

Title IX’s 50th anniversary: a milestone for equality

The 50th anniversary of Title IX, the landmark federal civil rights law in education co-authored by former Hawai’i Congresswoman **Patsy Takemoto Mink**, was celebrated June 23 near her statue at the Hawai’i State Library. The event, coordinated by UH and local women’s organizations, was attended by Governor Ige, First Lady Dawn Amano-Ige, Supreme Court Justice Sabrina McKenna, state legislators and others.



Patsy Takemoto Mink

The story of how Mink came to write Title IX is part of the continuing saga in women’s fight for equality. “No one would hire her. So she wrote Title IX and changed history for millions of women,” according to an article in “The 74.” It describes Mink’s career as the first woman of color to be elected to Congress and the co-author of the 1972 groundbreaking federal civil rights law that prohibits sex discrimination in education. Mink had applied to a dozen medical schools but was denied admission because she was a woman. So she earned a law degree but still couldn’t get a job because she was a working mother. “I didn’t start off wanting to be in politics,” Mink once told a reporter. “Not being able to get a job from anybody changed things.” **Title IX has led to millions of girls and women participating in high school and college sports, earning scholarships and enrolling in medicine, law and other fields.** In awarding the 2014 Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously to Mink, President Barack Obama praised her dedication to equality, saying, “Patsy was a passionate advocate for realizing the full promise of the American Dream.”

Student journalists protected

Governor Ige has signed HB 1848, establishing freedom of speech and press protections for student journalists in Hawai’i’s public schools and at the University of Hawai’i. It also protects student advisors from retaliation for refusing to censor student journalists.

“One of my administration’s goals has been to provide students with the tools they need to be successful in their chosen careers,” said the governor, himself a former high school newspaper editor. “Providing student journalists with the same protections they’d have working in the industry gives them real-world learning opportunities.”



Governor and Mrs. Ige with journalism students and advisor Cindy Reves.

The governor and House Speaker Scott Saiki, who introduced the bill, recognized student journalists and McKinley High School newspaper advisor Cindy Reves, who have been pushing for the measure since 2019.

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