

District 25 News

MAKIKI, TANTALUS, MCCULLY, PAPAOLEA

MARCH 2009

MAKIKI LIBRARY
Official Grand
Re-Opening

Aloha Neighbors!

The Legislature recently passed two important deadlines – First Crossover & Budget Crossover. The House is now reviewing Senate bills that have survived these deadlines. Shoring up the economy and balancing the State budget continues to be at the forefront of legislators' minds. Please review the mid-session highlights in this newsletter and feel free to contact my office if you have questions or concerns about any bills that are moving through the legislative process.

With aloha,



Della Au Belatti
State Representative, District 25

Monday, April 6, 2009 House of Representatives Papa- kolea 75th Anniversary Floor Pres- entation

The State Legislature recognizes the Papakolea Hawaiian Homestead, one of the first Hawaiian Homesteads in the state, upon its 75th Anniversary with a House session floor presentation and a post-session reception. Session begins at 12 noon at the State Capitol, and the reception will commence at 12:30pm.

Monday, April 13, 2009 Arcadia Retirement Community Coffee Talk

Beginning at 10:00am, Arcadia Retirement Community hosts Rep. Belatti for a coffee talk to discuss important community issues or concerns for Arcadia residents.

Wednesday, April 15, 2009 One Kalakaua Coffee Talk

Beginning at 2:00pm, One Kalakaua will host Rep. Belatti and a guest from HPD to discuss neighborhood issues including local crime and the homeless.

Monday, May 11, 2009 MCLC & Hui o Makiki Legislative Coffee Talk

Running from 6:00pm to 8:00pm, the second in this year's series of legislative coffee talks at the Makiki Library's new Frank F. Fasi Community Resource Center will serve as a legislative wrap-up in which legislators from the district will discuss the results of the 2009 legislative session.

For questions about any of these events, please contact Rep. Belatti's office at 586-9425.

The Shortlist

Makiki Library Grand Re-Opening & Frank F. Fasi Citizen Resource Center Dedication [March 25 – April 5]

Makiki celebrates the long-anticipated grand reopening of the Makiki Library this month through a series of community events, including the dedication of The Frank F. Fasi Citizen Resource Center, a facility that connects residents to one another and to their government through interactive, engaging, and substantive programs. Volunteer Legal Services will also be on hand for two free tax preparation workshops during the celebration.

COMPLETE EVENT SCHEDULE:

Wednesday, March 25

2:00-8:00pm Scholastic Book Fair and Used Book Sale
5:30pm Dedication of the Frank F. Fasi Citizen Resource Center

Saturday, March 28

9:00am-4:00pm Scholastic Book Fair and Used Book Sale
9:00am-12:00pm Tax Preparation Workshop

Sunday, March 29

12 noon- 4:00pm Scholastic Book Fair and Used Book Sale
12 noon Children's Japanese-English Story Hour

Wednesday, April 1

2:00-8:00pm Scholastic Book Fair and Used Book Sale
5:00-7:30pm Tax Preparation Workshop

Saturday, April 4

9:00am-4:00pm Scholastic Book Fair and Used Book Sale

Sunday, April 5

12 noon-4:00pm Scholastic Book Fair and Used Book Sale

Mid-legislative session 2009 update



Summaries of a few of the little-known gems moving through the Legislature this year.

At the beginning of each legislative session, thousands of bills are introduced in both the House and Senate that suggest new laws, revisions to existing statutes, priorities for state spending, and amendments to the State Constitution. During the first seven weeks of the session, these bills are whittled down through the committee hearing process and then “crossed over” to the other chamber for further consideration and refinement. In addition to the many bills that receive considerable media attention, the following bills are just some of the interesting measures now moving through the House.

{ THE STATE BUDGET & TAXATION }

Fee Increases (HB 39)

Adds a \$5 surcharge to various state fees (i.e. permit applications, issuances, or renewals; loan, loan guarantee, grant-in-aid, purchase of service applications; recordation of documents; lease or other conveyance of property applications, issuances, or renewals; tax clearance applications; acquisition of procurement solicitation documents; state inspections; or state examinations)

State Earned Income Tax Credit (HB 333)

Establishes a state EITC to encourage low-wage workers to remain in the workforce by enabling them to keep more of their earnings. Creates the EITC to be funded initially with temporary assistance for needy families (“TANF”) funds, and restricts the interest charged by tax preparers to clients who claim the earned income tax credit.

Income Tax Brackets (HB 1747)

Assists lower- and middle-income residents and families while maintain the integrity of Hawaii’s general fund revenues by:

- Increasing standard deductions for all filers by 10 percent;
- Increasing the personal exemption by 10 percent; and

- Adding new tax brackets for incomes over \$250,000 for joint filers, \$187,500 for head of household filers, and \$125,000 for single filers,

beginning in taxable years after December 31, 2010.

Income Tax Increase (HB 1771, HB 1772)

Both of these bills add eight higher-income tax brackets and apply higher income tax rates to taxpayers within those brackets. HB 1772 goes one step further by also decreasing the income tax rates for taxpayers within lower- and moderate-income tax brackets.

Salary Freezes (HB 1536)

Freezes salaries of the Governor, Lt. Governor, justices and judges of all state courts, Administrative Director of the State, departmental directors and deputy directors, and members of the Legislature to provide some relief to the effects of the current fiscal crisis.

{ TAPPING INTO THE AMERICAN RECOVERY & REINVESTMENT ACT OF 2009 }

Green Economy Jobs (HB 281)

Appropriates funds for & directs the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (“DBEDT”) to identify and develop a strategy to meet the needs of a green economy sector & to create a “green collar” workforce. Establishes an emergency environmental workforce to provide jobs for approximately 400-450 recently unemployed individuals to assist with eradication of invasive species or other ongoing environmental improvement programs.

Temporary Procurement, Rule-Making & Employment Exemptions; TANF Funds (HB1184)

Creates temporary exemptions in procurement, rule-making, & employment statutes for programs, services, & benefits in order to use funds allocated to the State from the federal stimulus bill. Appropriates \$100,000,000 from TANF funds taken from the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009 as authorized by that Act.

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Water & Wastewater Infrastructure Projects (HB 1807)

Appropriates federal funds for and authorizes the Director of the Department of Health to use these funds for drinking water & wastewater infrastructure programs.

{ HEALTH CARE & HUMAN SERVICES }

Tobacco Products Tax Increase

- (HB 1175): Increases the cigarette tax from 10 cents to 20 cents per cigarette beginning July 1, 2009;
- (HB 895): Increases the tax on tobacco products other than cigarettes from 40 percent to 60 percent of the wholesale price and depositing 33.3 percent of the proceeds into the Community Health Centers Special Fund.

Federal Stimulus Funds for State Health Care Programs (HB 1371)

Allocates funding provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 or other federal stimulus acts to finance increased Medicaid reimbursements, disproportionate share hospital payments, and the Hawaii Children's Health Care Program.

State Health Information Exchange (HB 1782)

Creates an office of state coordinator of health information exchange within the Department of Health and the Department of Accounting and General Services, and establishes the planning framework for a statewide health information exchange.

{ EDUCATION }

Reconstituting Schools (HB 172)

Ensures that Hawaii's students receive no less than the quality education they deserve by allowing the Superintendent of Education to:

- Reconstitute a public school, except a charter school, which has been in restructuring for four or more school years and has not advanced significantly toward improving academic performance. In reconstituting a school, the Superintendent may take actions that include replacing all or most staff, entering into contracts with private entities to manage schools, and changing the membership of the school community council; and
- Recommend to the Charter School Review Panel actions that should be taken to reconstitute a charter

school that has been in restructuring for four or more years, and recommend to the Panel the revocation of the school's charter.

School Consolidation (HB 1376)

Provides for the timely construction, expansion, or closure of public schools through a Facilities Alignment Commission & directs the Board of Education to proceed with recommendations if the Legislature does not disapprove of the recommendations in their entirety.

{ ENVIRONMENT }

Recreational Renaissance (HB 980)

Enables the Department of Land and Natural Resources to provide well-maintained recreational facilities to the public by authorizing improvements at water- and land-based recreational facilities through funding sources.

The bill seeks to::

- Establish a recreational renaissance special fund within DLNR. Pays for renaissance projects with GO bonds, additional fees, fee increases, and sales/leases on land dedicated to producing revenue;
- Allow for the designation of industrial parks and development agreements (with private companies, federal agencies, counties);
- Authorize development at Keehi Small Boat Harbor and Triangle Island;
- Increase moorage fees at small boat harbors over five years to an amount set by appraisal;
- Authorize the assessment of utility and common area maintenance fees at small boat harbors; and
- Stimulate jobs. More than \$30 million in projects are ready to begin construction this year, and more than \$20 million are ready to begin construction in 2010.

{ URBAN CONCERNS }

Graffiti Eradication (HB 136)

Establishes the Graffiti Eradication Sentencing Program within the Judiciary to allow a person who has committed an act of graffiti to discharge a community service sentence through graffiti eradication activities.

Reducing Noise (HB 64)

Prohibits as disorderly conduct the operation of yard equipment (i.e. leaf blowers, lawn mowers, weed whackers and chainsaws) between 8 pm and 8 am on any week day.

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Stemming the flood

Government agencies move toward drafting of environmental impact statement as next step for long-awaited Ala Wai Watershed canal revitalization project

By MATT WINFREE

It is nearly impossible to live in Honolulu for any length of time without hearing at least one story about the infamous Ala Wai Canal. Tales of floods, raw sewage dumping, jellyfish infestation and flesh-eating bacteria are so grim that they've achieved the status of urban legend. The reputation of the historic man-made waterway and the watershed that feeds into it is further darkened when we learn that many of these legends are actually true, punctuated by a devastating 2004 flood in Manoa and the 2006 death of a man who fell into the Ala Wai boat harbor and contracted three types of flesh-eating bacteria. Truly, one needs only to walk along the picturesque banks of the canal and inhale its signature odor, or scan just below the murky surface for all manners of discarded trash to know that the Ala Wai Canal, and the expansive watershed that drains into it, are facing serious problems.

What is the Ala Wai Watershed, and Why is it Important to Makiki?

The Ala Wai watershed is the area mauka of the Ala Wai Canal that drains into the canal when it rains, and Makiki residents may be surprised to learn that we live in its very heart. The Makiki Stream has been one of the original channels for runoff from the Ko'olau Mountains to make its way down to near-shore waters even before the 1928 completion of the Ala Wai

Canal. The management of waste, sediment, and runoff from our community contributes significantly to the water quality of the canal and our groundwater supply, and we are also on the border of the area of Honolulu that would be subject to severe flooding if the watershed is incapable of handling extreme sustained rainfall.

What's being done to improve the Watershed and the Canal?

The government's efforts to protect against flooding and to improve the water quality of the canal and its various feeder streams began over a decade ago. In October of 1998, the US Congress authorized the Ala Wai Flood Project (now the Ala Wai Watershed Project), sponsored by the US Army Corps of Engineers, the State Department of Land and Natural Resources, and the C&C of Honolulu Department of Envi-

ronmental Services, to minimize the risk of flood damage to the public. After years of further assessment and analysis, the scope of the project has broadened to include:

- Protecting Waikiki and the surrounding areas from flooding;
- Preserving, restoring, or reversing the degradation of natural watershed function and processes, where possible, throughout the watershed and urban areas;
- Reducing sediment buildup in the streams and Ala Wai Canal;
- Enhancing the physical quality of existing aquatic habitat for native species;
- Developing and implementing a public involvement process that will result in ongoing, community based stewardship actions for the watershed.

How can Makiki residents get involved?

Makiki residents have a unique opportunity to become a part of the feasibility stage discussions in April. Cindy Barger will be present at Hui o Makiki's April 4th meeting to provide updates on the project and to discuss potential methods to mitigate flooding in our community. The meeting is at 9am in the Makiki Library's Arts & Crafts Building.

If you are unable to attend the meeting, or would like to learn more about the project, go to www.alawaiwatershed.com for the most current information. The website provides a variety of documents, maps, links to related sites, and a comments section where you can make your ideas or concerns known to the project sponsors.

The project is currently in its "feasibility stage," through which Ala Wai Watershed Project Manager Cindy Barger of the US Army Corps of Engineers is carrying out various discussions, studies, and planning meetings with a wide range of public and private organizations in preparation for drafting an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS, which is scheduled to be drafted within the next two years, will provide the necessary research and support for major improvements to be made to the watershed and the canal.

Questions & answers on Qualifying for the earned income tax credit

By ADRIENNE IWAMOTO SUAREZ

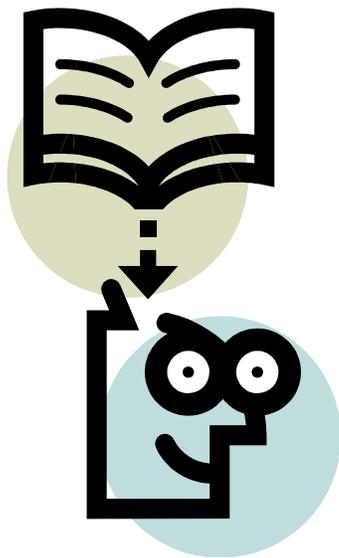
This article is intended to provide general information about the earned income tax credit, but it is not intended to be tax advice. To make the most of the credits that you may be eligible for, please consult a tax professional.

What is the EITC?

The EITC was established in 1975 to help low- to moderate-income workers offset the costs of Social Security. The EITC, or earned income tax credit, provides federal income tax relief for low- and moderate-income working individuals and families. It supplements their earnings by reducing their income tax burden. The taxpayer may apply the credit against the amount of income taxes he or she owes.

If the amount of taxes owed is less than the credit, the taxpayer receives a refund for the difference from the federal government. Last year, the federal government paid low- to moderate-income working taxpayers in Hawaii \$155 million in EITC refunds. Those taxpayers, in turn, contributed this money to Hawaii's economy by buying necessary goods and services, generating \$4.6 million in general excise taxes for the state.

The EITC has been one of the federal government's more successful methods for encouraging low- and moderate-income taxpayers to keep working, lifting 4.4 million people out of poverty each year. In fact, the EITC lifts more children out of poverty than any single government program. The purpose of the EITC, in short, is to "make work pay." Unfortunately, many low- to moderate-income working people who qualify for the EITC are not claiming it, either because they do not file their taxes or they self-file and unaware of their eligibility. Each year, \$44 million dollars in EITC refunds go unclaimed.



Do I qualify for the EITC?

If you are a taxpayer supporting a family, you must meet the following criteria:

- you have a qualifying child. A qualifying child is defined as your son, daughter, stepchild, eligible foster child, adopted child, or a descendant of any of these people, or a brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister, stepbrother, stepsister, or a descendant of any of these people. Your qualifying child must be under 19 at the end of the year, a full-time student under age 24 at the end of the year, or permanently and totally disabled at any time during the year, regardless of age. Your qualifying child must have lived with you in the United States for half of the year; and
- your qualifying child cannot be used by more than one person to claim the EITC.

If you are a taxpayer who is not supporting a family, you must meet the following criteria:

- you must be at least age 25 but under age 65 at the end of the year;
- you must have lived in the United States for more than half of the year; and
- you cannot be claimed as a dependent of another person.

Regardless of whether you are supporting a family, you must also meet the following criteria:

- you have a valid Social Security Number;
- you have earned income from employment or self employment;
- you are a U. S. citizen or resident alien all year, or a nonresident alien married to a U.S. citizen or resident alien and filing a joint return;
- you cannot be claimed as a qualifying child by someone else;
- your filing status cannot be married, filing separately;
- you will not file a Form 2555 or 2555-EZ (related to foreign earned income);
- your adjusted gross income must be less than:
 - \$38,646 (\$41,646 married filing jointly) with two or more qualifying children;
 - \$33,995 (\$36,995 married filing jointly) with one qualifying child;

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At last!

Makiki Library's grand re-opening celebration, featuring the dedication of The Frank F. Fasi Citizen Resource Center



MAKIKI COFFEE TALK at the Makiki Library mezzanine soon to become the Frank F. Fasi Citizen Resource Center, March 4, 2009—(L-R): Senator Brickwood Galuteria, Councilmember Rod Tam, Representative Della Au Belatti, Senator Carol Fukunaga, Representative Karl Rhoads, and Councilmember Duke Bainum take their turns answering questions from the community. The March coffee talk was one of two civic events hosted to date by MCLC, Hui o Makiki, and Rep. Belatti at the Fasi Resource Center.

On March 25th, Friends of the Makiki Community Learning Center (“the Friends”) will mark the official grand re-opening of the Makiki Library by dedicating The Frank F. Fasi Citizen Resource Center in honor of former Mayor Frank Fasi’s founding and continuous support of the library. This dedication kicks off a two-week series of events, from March 25th to April 5th, that celebrate the Library’s long-anticipated re-opening for regular public use.

Mayor Frank F. Fasi was instrumental in founding the Makiki Library, appropriating the necessary city funds, books, and essential furniture to allow for its 1976 debut as the state’s only independent, city-sponsored library.

“The Fasi Citizen Resource Center will connect residents to one another and to their government through interactive, engaging, and substantive programs,” says Norma Koenig, President of the Friends. Other scheduled events at the library include a Scholastic Book Fair and used book sale, free tax preparation workshops sponsored by Volunteer Legal Services of Hawaii and Rep. Della Au Belatti, and children’s story hours.

After decades of service to the Makiki community, the library was closed in 2005 due to the need for extensive repair and refurbishing. After three years of

renovation, Mayor Mufi Hannemann returned the keys to the library to the Friends in March of 2008, and the non-profit group has been working since that time to ready the library for public use.

Volunteer Legal Services of Hawaii has partnered with Aloha United Way this year to once again provide free tax preparation service to low-income workers and retirees. The program was extremely successful last year, preparing over 7,500 returns and helping citizens to claim more than \$6.1 million in credits and refunds.

Apart from offering a wide selection of new and used books for children and adults, the Scholastic Book Fair provides a unique opportunity for generous Makiki Library supporters to augment the library’s collection. Scholastic will insert a name plate in each donated book recognizing the donor for his or her contribution, creating a lasting public record of library supporters. The library accepts donations for its collection and for the used book sale every Sunday from 1:00pm–3:00pm.

The Makiki Library is located at 1527 Keeaumoku Street, on the corner of Keeaumoku Street and Wilder Avenue just mauka of H-1. The library’s regular hours of operation are Wednesdays, 2:00–6:00pm, and Saturdays & Sundays, 12:00noon–4:00pm.

Mid-session update *continued from page 3*

Solar/Wind Energy for Condominiums (HB 197)

Gives boards of directors of condominiums the authority to install or allow the installation of solar energy or wind energy devices on the common elements of condominiums.

These bills and all measures from the 2009 Legislative Session may be followed via the State Capitol website at www.capitol.hawaii.gov. Go to the Quick Find at the bottom right hand corner and type in the bill number (e.g. HB197) to pull up bill’s current status, text, and testimony.

About the EITC *continued from page 5*

- \$12,880 (\$15,880 married filing jointly) with no qualifying children; and
- your investment income must be \$2,950 or less for 2008.

How much is the credit?

For 2008, a single or married taxpayer claiming two qualified children may receive up to \$4,824; a single or married taxpayer claiming

one qualified child may receive up to \$2,917; a single or married taxpayer with no qualifying children may receive up to \$438.

How can I claim the EITC?

You must file a federal income tax return for 2008. A number of organizations can help you file your taxes for little or no cost. The Aloha United Way has compiled a list of organizations providing free tax assistance. Please visit their website, www.hawaiiitaxhelp.org, for more information.

2009 Community Survey

Please spend a few minutes to read through and provide your comments on the following issues.

Many thank yous to those who provided their responses to last year's survey. Survey results were compiled and published in the October/November 2008 issue of *District 25 News*. An electronic version of this and all other newsletters may be downloaded from Representative Belatti's House Majority webpage at http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/hsemaj/.belatti_della.html. Your name and address are optional, but we will send responses only to those who provide their mailing information.

STATE ECONOMIC PRIORITIES

As we enter a period of economic uncertainty, state legislators will be tasked this session to prioritize spending, outline new policies, and make adjustments to old ones. Please rank the following ideas for spending in order of importance to you.

- ___ Ensuring energy self-sufficiency/sustainability
- ___ Investing in our natural, historic, and cultural resources
- ___ Maintaining high-tech tax credit
- ___ Streamlining state tax code
- ___ Funding UH system improvements
- ___ Maintaining funding for K-12 education programs
- ___ Improving state K-12 educational facilities
- ___ Improving traffic and pedestrian safety
- ___ Maintaining funding to ensure accessible basic healthcare for all
- ___ Maintaining funding for state social programs and community services
- ___ Improving infrastructure for agriculture (i.e. dams, reserves, irrigation)
- ___ Improving transportation infrastructure (i.e. roads, highways, harbors, airports)
- ___ Improving government operations and efficiency
- ___ Other _____

CONSUMER (PERSONAL) FIRECRACKERS IN HAWAII

Proponents for a fireworks ban argue that fireworks laws are becoming even more difficult to enforce and law-breakers and uneducated fireworks users create a strain on emergency services agencies, including fire, police and ambulance. A statewide ban (instead of allowing each county to decide for themselves) is the only proper solution to ensure illegal fireworks aren't transported between islands. And at least within Oahu's growing and dense urban core, fireworks play continues to be a public safety hazard to people, animals, and property and state laws much be changed to keep up with changing times.

Opponents against a fireworks ban argue that firework celebrations are long-held cultural and historic traditions that the public has a right to enjoy. A complete ban on fireworks seeks to take away this privilege from those who obey the laws, instead of just those who choose to break them. State lawmakers must continue to consider and work with other ways to regulate the sale and use of fireworks rather than imposing an outright ban including a tax surcharge, tougher criminal punishments, and tougher restrictions in urban areas.

Do you support a ban on fireworks? The following responses correspond with various legislative proposals to regulate fireworks.

- YES. I support a statewide ban on fireworks.
- YES. I support a ban on fireworks, but only on the island of Oahu.
- NO. I do not support a ban on fireworks.
- NO. I do not support a ban on fireworks, but I do support a surcharge tax on the sale of fireworks that will go to fund non-crucial State Department of Health programs.
- NO OPINION/NO ANSWER.

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