



MidWeek

This column by Senator Michelle Kidani was published in MidWeek's Central Oahu VOICE section on Wednesday, October 21, 2015.

Preparing for the 2016 Legislative Session

In just three short months, the Legislature will convene its regular 60-day working session at the State Capitol. Lawmakers have been preparing for this official business part of our responsibilities during the last few months, including public briefings on several matters.

As Chair of the Senate's Committee on Education, I have met with principals from Central District schools to talk story and hear concerns. Principals are closest to the action on their campuses and play an important role in the planning process.

I also convened an informational briefing with my counterpart, House Education Chair Representative Roy Takumi, to learn about pilot programs in five areas across the state designed to assure that students are reading at appropriate levels by third grade. Later, our two committees also received an update on the State Public Charter School Commission standards for evaluating charter school performance as school contracts come up for renewal.

While there are no charter school campuses within the boundaries of my Senate District 18, we all share the responsibility to see that all 34 charter schools statewide are performing at the highest possible level and are accountable for the DOE funding made available to them. I anticipate further public hearings on charter schools as our session gets underway in January.

This coming session I will also serve as Vice Chair of the Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection and Health, and as a member of the Committees on Higher Education and the Arts, and Transportation and Energy.

In my capacity as Vice Chair of the committee that deals with health issues, I was invited to an extremely informative national conference that focused on promoting lifestyles that support cardiovascular health. We heard from experts in the field of heart disease prevention and from medical services providers serving individuals, communities and healthcare systems. The New York conference was jointly sponsored by the National Black Caucus and the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators. My colleague Senator Donovan Dela Cruz and I attended the conference, and since we are part-Hispanic legislators (of Puerto Rican ethnicity), our attendance at the conference was paid for by the Hispanic Caucus.

By the way, the National Hispanic Caucus reminded us that it will again be awarding scholarships to high school seniors of Hispanic heritage graduating in the Class of 2016. One part of the application process is for students to contact their lawmakers of Hispanic background – including Senators Dela Cruz and myself – for letters of recommendation and support. We take a special interest in this opportunity because one of the eleven national scholarship recipients in 2014 was Mililani High School grad Isis Usborne, now studying at UH Manoa.

More information about applications and deadlines will be forthcoming.

Real traffic relief is on the way

Remember Van Pool Hawaii? When Federal and State funding for the ride sharing program expired a few years ago, that service was operating 300 vans that transported 1,600 commuters island wide. In the past two legislative sessions I fought for \$500,000 in state funding for the city to re-establish ride sharing as a viable alternative for Oahu motorists. A recent meeting with Honolulu City Managing Director Roy Amemiya and Transportation Services Director Mike Formby brought encouraging assurances that the city plans to begin such a program perhaps as early as March. I appreciate Mayor Caldwell's assistance in moving forward with this project and will continue to push for state support for real ways we can work together to relieve traffic congestion.

