

# Hawaii Reporter

## Freedom to Report Real News

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### **Hawaii GOP: 'Republicans Do Make a Difference'**

*LG Surprise Announcement; Prosecutor Out of the Political Closet; Popular Weekend for GOP Volunteers; New State Party Chair Elected; Mayor Baptiste: From Sleepy and Sluggish to Sparky and Spunky; Governor Rehashes Legislative Session to Rally Republicans for 2008; Special Session in the Works; Republican Reality Check*

By Malia Zimmerman, 5/21/2007 12:49:54 AM

The biggest surprise at the Hawaii Republican Party convention this weekend -- themed "Republicans Do Make a Difference" -- was the soft launch of Lt. Gov. James "Duke" Aiona's campaign for governor in 2010. Rumors circulated for the last year or so that Aiona had no interest in replacing Gov. Linda Lingle when her second term expires three years from now, and instead preferred a position at the University of Hawaii.

But the lieutenant governor quelled those stories on Saturday, May 19, when he outlined in a 25-minute speech what "I believe." Introduced by his wife Vivian as a "super hero," his comments largely focused on continuing to implement the Lingle/Aiona platform by strengthening the economy, helping small businesses and reducing crime and substance abuse -- he also spoke of much he'd learned and grown as a public servant in the nearly 5 years he's served in this position.

Unlike previous Gov. Benjamin Cayetano (1994 to 2002) who was not supportive of his Lt. Gov. Mazie Hirono's run for governor in 2002, Gov. Lingle was extremely complimentary of Aiona -- those in attendance perceived that as her early endorsement of his candidacy.

### **Prosecutor Out of the (Political) Closet**

While many of Hawaii's Democrats still believe the popular three-term Honolulu City Prosecutor Peter Carlisle is a Democrat, he apparently isn't.

Carlisle, (who used to bluntly steer away from partisan discussions saying prosecutors should be non-partisan), chaired the Republican Convention. The primary emcee for the event, Carlisle joked that long-time GOP leader Miriam Hellrich and Lingle had "twisted his arm" to get him to join the party.

While some suggest Carlisle will run for governor in 2010, Republican Party leaders say it is more likely that Carlisle is eyeing a Congressional seat. Carlisle considered the Congressional race in 2006 when then U.S. Rep. Ed Case opted to run for U.S. Senate.

But many fellow GOPers said Carlisle would be better off challenging Rep. Neil Abercrombie in the First Congressional District rather than trying to quickly woo a neighbor island crowd likely unfamiliar with him. The First District includes Honolulu, where Carlisle handily won the last three political races. But Carlisle divulged no secrets during the 3-day conference -- he is still mum on his future plans.

### **Popular Weekend for GOP Volunteers**

While Sen. Sam Slom, Reps. Lynn Finnegan, Kymberly Pine, Gene Ward and Corinne Ching were the only elected members of 13 Republicans in the Hawaii State Legislature to show up, the event was well attended with the island of Hawaii having the biggest delegation.

Nearly 200 Republicans participated in the 3-day event, including Honolulu City Council Member Charles Djou.

2006 Congressional Candidate Quentin Kawanakoa and former state Rep. Brian Blundell both made brief appearances. Kawanakoa considered a run at Republican Party Chair this year, but instead kept a low

profile and quiet on his future political plans. Blundell, a resident of Maui, did not seek re-election in 2006 after he was arrested on charges of fourth degree sexual assault for allegedly groping an undercover police officer in Kapiolani Park.

Republicans, who once held several House seats on Maui, were disappointed that they lost Blundell's seat and other former Republican seats to the Democrats. At this convention, they spoke of plans to retake these positions. New Maui party chair Kay Ghean is enthusiastic about turning the local party losses around in 2008 and 2010.

### **New State Party Chair Elected**

Willes Lee, a West Point graduate who retired as an Airborne and Ranger Army officer after 22 years of service, was elected State Chairman of the Hawaii Republican Party on Sunday, May 20. He replaces Sam Aiona, a former state Representative and cousin of the lieutenant governor who served as state chair for 3 years in the 2006 election cycle.

Currently serving as the Chairman of the Hawaii State Boxing Commission, Lee was also the former manager of Councilmember Charles Djou's 2006 campaign and the Gov. Linda Lingle Campaign Committee Director of Coalitions. He has extensive experience working in the Republican Party locally, also serving as Party Vice-Chairman, Chairman of the Rules Committee, a member of the Hawaii Republican Party Victory Campaign team, Delegate at the Republican National Convention and member of the Republican National Committee Platform Committee. His wife Julie is one of the heads of the Oahu Republican Women's group.

Lee says he will bring the party back to basics and focus on the issues that the average Hawaii citizen believes is important: "The Lingle-Aiona Administration has led our state through unprecedented economic times, however, Hawaii has yet to see the true benefits of a two-party system. I am committing 100 percent of my time to doing that."

Gov. Lingle says: "Willes brings the commitment, discipline, and experience of grassroots campaigning that helped my campaign be as successful as it was to the Party. He understands the importance of team building and creating an environment that people want to be a part of."

### **Mayor Baptiste: From Sleepy and Sluggish to Sparky and Spunky**

Kauai County Mayor Bryan J. Baptiste, who normally appears sleepy and sluggish and rarely speaks publicly, was unusually animated during his 15-minute talk during which he shared his experiences in the 2006 election.

A consummate campaigner who has never lost an election, Baptiste talked about his mistakes and wrong assumptions leading up to the 2006 primary.

His internal political polls showed him way ahead in the 2006 primary, so many of his key volunteers, donors and even relatives did not go to the polls to cast their vote for him.

Baptiste had to win by 51 percent of the vote or run against the next highest vote getter in the upcoming General election. By 3:30 a.m. on the morning after primary election night, Baptiste was told by election officials that he won, but by only two votes. To make matters worse, there were three spoiled ballots, which if counted, would reverse his victory. Baptiste's results were challenged in court, so he was not sure if he actually won for three weeks. Calling this his purgatory, Baptiste says, "That was not a good place to be."

In the end, the court ruled that Baptiste had in fact won. But Baptiste says he learned many valuable and painful lessons during this experience. The first is a natural -- every vote really does count and that vote is powerful. The second -- don't take any vote for granted. He told fellow Republicans to ask family members, friends, volunteers and donors to make sure they go to the polls. Baptiste says many friends and family members apologized to him for skipping their important civic duty that day, including his niece who

confessed to him after the election was over that she'd forgotten to mail her absentee ballot, which was still in her purse. "I was running against apathy and that is tough to do because unlike an opponent, you can't see it, you don't know where it will show up, or what to do," Baptiste says. His final lesson: Be humble and remember the politicians are there to serve the people, not the other way around.

GOP leaders point to the senate "kangaroo trial" on Lingle Cabinet members during the recent legislative session for opportunities to pick-up seats in the state House and Senate.

"It was an embarrassment in what the Senate put Lingle appointees through. It's just another example of why we need balance in the Legislature. I am committed to assuring Hawaii never has to experience that again. It wasn't fair and it showed bad judgment," said Lee.

The Lingle administration has provided strong leadership and much more could be done. Discussions focused around improving communication plans, both to the general public as well as at the grassroots level. Hawaii Republicans will recommit to enhancing their friend-to-friend, family-to-family grassroots communication efforts that helped grow the party when Linda Lingle served as Party Chair back in 1999.

### **Governor Rehashes Legislative Session to Rally Republicans for 2008**

Gov. Linda Lingle talked about the disrespect that the Democrat majority leaders showed toward her cabinet members and judicial nominees during the 2008 legislative session, once again calling the Senate a 'kangaroo court.'

Backed by examples shared by both Sen. Sam Slom and House Minority Leader Lynn Finnegan, Lingle also noted the overrides of her vetoes -- and the Democrat majority's undying loyalty to the Hawaii Government Employees Association to the exclusion of all other groups and individuals in Hawaii.

Lingle used these as two important reasons why Republicans need gains in both the House and Senate in 2008 and 2010. The Republican Party currently holds 5 of 25 Senate seats and 8 of 51 House seats.

"It was an embarrassment in what the Senate put Lingle appointees through. It's just another example of why we need balance in the Legislature," says Lee.

### **Rating the Legislative Session**

While Sen. Sam Slom gave the state Legislature an "F" for accomplishments this session, he and House Minority Leader Lynn Finnegan did highlight some of the Republican successes, which mostly included thwarting bad legislation.

That included stopping the veto override of the National Popular Vote in the House, getting the judicial nomination of Glenn Kim through the Senate despite opposition from the judiciary chair, and pushing for the ethanol tax exemption. Republicans also helped stop all by mail elections and same day registration for elections, because of their concerns over exposing the system to voter fraud. They also successfully pushed for a charter school panel with the authority to establish new charter schools -- this replaces the bureaucratic BOE and DOE, which normally block or slow down the formation of charter schools.

House Republicans also helped expose and stop the "Romy Cachola bill," which said that if a legislator served in the state House or Senate for 5 years, and is now in the City Council, at retirement age, he or she can collect government retirement.

However, they noted many other Republican bills did not pass including tax rebates for most taxpayers in Hawaii, the elimination of General Excise Tax on food and medical services, and tort reform to ensure Hawaii's medical doctors can continue to work in Hawaii. Republicans were also disappointed, but not surprised, that an ethics bill that would have required more transparency by lawmakers, did not pass and instead Democrats said they would study the concept.

Finnegan and Slom both confirmed that there will be a special session called by Democrat leaders on July 10 or July 11 to override more of the governor's vetos of labor bills supported by the Hawaii Government Employees Association, "Just because they can" and because they want to "stick it to the governor."

### **Republican Reality Check**

Gov. Linda Lingle admitted that the party has been struggling since she won the governor's seat in 2002. House numbers have dropped from 20 to 8. The Republicans cannot "veto proof" the House. And the Senate can vote down her nominees at will.

Lingle addressed this problem head on, saying Republicans can make serious gains if they are united and determined (and she added, if they don't air their dirty laundry in public).

"We've had good and bad days, have to learn from the past, look forward with optimism," Lingle says.

She pointed to her own victory -- being elected as Maui mayor in 1990 as the first (and only) person to not born there -- as one seemingly impossible feat that the Republicans helped pull off. She reminded them that she was the first woman governor and first Republican governor in 40 years to be elected -- and that in her bid for re-election, she was the first governor to ever win in all 51 House districts. "I am asking for your help again," Lingle told a packed room of cheering Republican supporters.

Lingle outlined her specific plans over two Saturday speeches. Republicans will improve their grassroots organization and communication, which they say "helped grow the party when Linda Lingle served as Party Chair back in 1999."

Former Party Chair Sam Aiona, who says he will continue to serve as a party volunteer, used a quote from former President Ronald Reagan to sum up his feeling on what needs to be done: " 'It's hard when you're up to your armpits in alligators to remember you came here to drain the swamp,' " but, he added, "that is what we need to do."

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