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House GOP: Legislature Needs Sunshine and Ethics Reform

By Danielle Douglass, 3/14/2007 8:27:23 PM

HONOLULU – Members of the House Republican caucus held a press conference today to address two issues they have filed resolutions for. The resolutions call for increased sunshine at the Capitol through amending House rules, and ethics reform through a request that the State Ethics Commission conduct a study addressing conflict of interest.

"These resolutions are about doing the right thing and the public's right to know what is happening here at the Legislature," said Rep. Lynn Finnegan (District 32 - Lower Pearlridge, Aiea, Halawa, Hickam, Pearl Harbor, Moanalua Gardens).

"During sunshine week, we want to bring it to the attention of the public that there are a lot of things we can do if we have the will to do it," said Rep. Gene Ward (17 - Kalama Valley, Queen's Gate, Hawaii Kai).

The first resolution pertains to amending the rules of the House, and includes the following points and requests:

- Increased notice of public hearings
- Having grants-in-aid and capital improvement projects voted on by the Finance committee before they are crossed over
- Equal representation for committees reduces politics and increases fairness

- Too much power is currently given to the chair of committees

The 48-hour notice rule for public hearings is set as a guideline but can be waived through the committee chair's request for situations he or she feels need to be rushed through. When the 48-hour notice is waived, members of the public are unable to adjust their busy schedules to voice concerns and comments on the measures before the Legislature.

"The public also has difficulty accessing bills, especially when bills are decked on a Friday night and are not posted until Saturday afternoon," said Rep. Barbara Marumoto.

The second resolution introduced today asks for members of the Legislature to be held to the highest ethical standards. It requests that the State Ethics Commission transmit a study to the House of Representatives before the 2008 session, as to what measures may be enacted in order to address possible conflicts of interest of members.

"Perceptions of conflicts of interest have been a problem within the House of Representatives, and we need to bring it out into the open, disclose conflicts and recuse ourselves from votes that would allow us substantial financial gain," said Rep. Finnegan.

Danielle Douglas works for the House GOP.

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