

Isle GOP bares legislative package

Car insurance reform and a ban on same-sex marriage are urged

By Mike Yuen
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Hitting hot-button issues, the House's 12 Republicans today unveiled their 1997 legislative plan, urging the fast-track passage of bills on same-sex marriage, increased prison bed space, auto insurance reform and legislative-pension reform.

Specifically, the Republicans are demanding the Democrat-dominated Legislature approve measures that would:

- Amend the Hawaii Constitution, making it clear that a marriage is solely defined as a union between a man and a woman.
- Provide an emergency appropriation for a boot-camp prison using tents as temporary shelters.
- Change the isles' no-fault insurance system to something that benefits consumers - not insurance firms or attorneys, the key players in the auto insurance fight.
- Eliminate the so-called "high-three" perk that allows lawmakers' pensions to be calculated by a more generous method that is not used for civil servants.



House Minority Leader Gene Ward said the bills should be passed in the first 20 working days of the session, which begins Wednesday; that would be by Feb. 13.

Many of the GOP concerns are mirrored by Democrats, whose leaders have also been discussing early passage of auto-insurance and high-three reform bills.

The House GOP is also pushing measures that it claims would save taxpayers \$179 million, and would put more money back in the pockets of residents. These include:

- A reduction in the number of state tax brackets, higher standard deductions and more personal exemptions (expected savings: \$79 million).
- Repeal of the 4 percent general excise tax on food and medical services (\$45 million).
- Eliminating the "pyramiding" of the excise tax on property leasing (\$44 million).

- Exempting from excise taxes the out-of-state work that architects, engineers and other professionals do (\$11 million).

House Republicans also opposed the Tax Review Commission's suggestion to tax pensions. But they want a constitutional amendment that would require a two-thirds vote of both House and Senate to raise taxes or repeal tax credits.

Like newly installed city Prosecutor Peter Carlisle, House Republicans favor a measure that would require convicted felons to serve at least 85 percent of their sentences; violent offenders would have to serve their full sentences.

The Republicans' "safer streets" package also includes:

- The "three strikes and that's life" proposal, which significantly increases the sentence for each successive crime committed by a violent criminal. The third offense means a life sentence without parole.
- The "one strike, you're an adult" proposal, which requires that youths who commit violent acts be treated as adults.

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