

Newswatch



By Star-Bulletin Staff

Wednesday, October 9, 1996

Legislators like plan to expand prisons

Democratic legislative leaders are lauding Gov. Ben Cayetano's plan for a 30 percent increase in bed space for the state's overcrowded prison system.

But Republicans say it doesn't go far enough. While they agree the initiative will be a high priority for the Legislature next year, they fault Cayetano for proposing the work be paid for with tax dollars.

"He's still afraid of Gary Rodrigues and the 'P' word," said House minority leader Gene Ward, referring to the union leader who represents prison guards and to the alternative of private financing.

"He's reaching into the wrong pocket - the taxpayers' - when he should be privatizing," Ward said.

There is no need to float bonds to pay for prison expansion when private firms are willing to come to Hawaii to build prisons and operate them with or without unions, Ward said.

Senate minority leader Michael Liu said the Cayetano administration should aggressively pursue federally guaranteed loan programs in which private companies would provide the cash for prison expansion.

Yesterday, Cayetano announced that he would seek \$10 million from the Legislature to build about 700 more prison beds, plus \$8.1 million for annual operating expenses.