

# Hawaii Reporter

## Freedom to Report Real News

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### **Living Up to Our Social Duty Will Save Hawaii**

By Daniel de Gracia, II, 2/8/2008 12:38:31 PM

On Feb. 6, 2008, President George W. Bush declared that "a major disaster" exists in the state of Hawaii. Though the president was talking about damage from rain storms, when I read the official White House press release, the first thought that entered my mind was, "It's about time someone called it like it is over here."

Maybe it's just me, but I consider it a disaster when, in a civilized first world society, babies are thrown from bridges and brutally slain by the impact of cars below. I consider it a disaster when 40 percent of persons arrested by the Honolulu Police Department test positive for methamphetamine use, and nearly 30,000 people in the City are hardcore users of the drug.

I consider it a disaster when, though in the year 1960 there were only 21 forcible rapes and 33 aggravated assaults reported in the entire state, today both figures rank in the thousands. Worst of all, I consider it a disaster when citizens are so terrified of their neighbors that they feel compelled to turn to gun stores and Taser catalogs for safety. As I was stuck in morning traffic, I saw a sticker attached to a car that showed the silhouette of an AR-15 assault rifle and the words "Defend Hawaii." Has it really come to that?

We need to change things here, and fast. But before you decide to vigorously exercise your Second Amendment and invest a thousand dollars of your next paycheck in an AR-15, I'd like to propose three things that will save Hawaii for far less cost to government and taxpayers alike -- if the citizens of this great State are willing to do them.

#### **Social Duty Number 1: Live Wisely**

Wisdom, put simply, is the proper application of knowledge. Most of us know the saying: "If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." We have to exercise wisdom if we want to prosper together and continue to be free. But where do we get wisdom? Wisdom is not the same thing as common sense, because the so-called "common sense" is heavily affected by one's maturity, cultural context, and previous experiences. Wisdom on the other hand is making decisions based on an accurate understanding of how things work and why they work the way they do. For years and even up until the nineteenth century, common sense dictated the employment of bloodletting as a means to cure diseases. Today, medical wisdom instructs us differently.

Our 21st century Hawaii is desperately in need of wise people. We need wise parents, wise school teachers, wise public servants and especially wise elected leaders. Most of us live life like a bull running through a china shop, taking things as they come and doing whatever impulse dictates. If that's the way you live, it's only natural that you're going to break a lot of things and people on the way. How many laws has our Legislature had to draft and pass because of a lack of collective wisdom? If more people acted in wisdom, less things would be wrong with our society and less enforced regulation would be hovering over our heads.

For individuals, obtaining and exercising wisdom means taking the time to carefully evaluate one's situation and to continually make a concerted effort to acquire timely, truthful information about what is happening. In 1983, the pilots of Korean Airlines Flight 007 locked the aircraft's autopilot after leaving Anchorage, Alaska and a small navigational error kept increasing until it resulted in the aircraft deviating hundreds of miles from its assigned flight path. Because its pilots did not exercise situational awareness and flight deck coordination -- meaning they didn't check to see if they were where they needed to be -- the crew and passengers of KAL 007 flew right into Soviet airspace where they were shot down at the loss of all souls.

Are we doing the same thing in our personal lives? Are we slowly drifting away from our husbands, wives,

and children because we aren't aware of where we are, and because we're not exercising wisdom, we're not checking and counter-checking our decisions? Are we heading for a shoot down in our personal lives and in our careers because we locked ourselves on course a long time ago, saying "Ainokea, I do what I want?"

For leaders -- and especially elected leaders -- obtaining and exercising wisdom encompasses the same domain as individual wisdom but also means acquiring and listening to good advisers who are consistently capable of harvesting accurate data, processing the data into useful information, and suggesting options, alternatives, and directives.

Good leaders make decisions based on correct information. Bad leaders make decisions based on emotion, gut instincts, lucky coincidences, and a whole host of other things which may not necessarily have any basis in real world truth. Good leaders also make a wise effort to duplicate themselves by mentoring other people to do the same as them, because they recognize that one day, like everything else, they will no longer be able to lead. Bad leaders refuse to mentor others because of fear of replacement and suppress growth.

The problem that faces Hawaii in multiple levels of elected leadership is that we elect people because we saw them waving signs on the street or because they knocked on our door. That's great, but if an idiot knocks on your door and you elect that idiot to office, you've now placed an idiot in a seat of authority who will likely surround themselves with other idiots who will now make idiot decisions on your behalf. Many people say, "I want an elected official who reminds me of me."

That's fine, but what if you're an idiot? An idiot representing idiots with a staff of idiots can't be expected to make good public policy -- but I'm sure all of us have already learned that lesson, just check the line on your next pay and earnings stub that says "State Withholding Taxes." Hawaii needs wisdom in its elected government if it wants to get out of the disaster that its in. Our number one social duty is to live wisely. There's a saying I'd like to share with you that perfectly sums up our prime social duty of living wisely:

"Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways."

### **Social Duty 2: Live Compassionately**

One definition of the word compassion is "a deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it." Though poverty, drugs, and violence are among the top three presenting problems in Hawaii, they are not the actual root cause for what is wrong with our state. One of the key problems with our Aloha State is that we are deficient in compassion. When people have no one to turn to or trust, it is extremely easy to fall prey to destructive thoughts which lead to destructive behaviors.

There are some moments in life where compassion is critical, and if it is not obtained, the psychologically weaker among us often fall into a snare that they are never able to escape. We need to live life with the attitude of a lifeguard, being constantly ready and available to dispense compassion to those in need, because what we do in an instant can determine what happens over the course of a lifetime. Ask yourself this question: if you fall, who can you trust to pick you up? And if those around you fall, can they trust you to pick them up? When society loses compassion, society falls apart.

I spoke to former Peace Corps volunteer and present-day State Representative Gene Ward (R-Hawaii Kai) and asked him what he thought about the value of human compassion. "Unfortunately," he said, "big government has replaced the compassion imperative of the individual. Having been a Peace Corps volunteer, what you express in your compassion, you receive so much in return, because that is the way the Universe is structured."

The Vice Chair of the state House Committee on Health, Rep. John Mizuno (D-Kalihi) likewise agreed that compassion was indispensable. "Compassion is an integral part of every human being, therefore it affects us and how we come up with legislation." A lack of compassion, therefore, brings about a series of societal blights which though they may have began as a problem of one, become the problem of all when unchecked

and left to fully mature.

Three weeks ago, one of my best friends was sentenced to 5 years in prison. I first met him at age 14, and I remember how smart, creative, and talented he was. We went to school together, we were in Air Force Junior ROTC together, we played together, fought together, and most importantly, grew up together.

But in his early childhood, his father committed suicide because of guilt, and since that day, he lived with extreme rage toward himself and others, going from one failed relationship to another, getting involved in heavy drinking, drugs, and violence.

He married at age 21 to the daughter of a wealthy dentist, but divorced in less than 5 years, leaving behind two children who will never know their father. Though all of us are responsible for our own actions, my friend grew up feeling like a reject because of his father's suicide. I often stop and wonder how his life would have turned out if his father had found compassion in his time of need and hadn't committed suicide.

Another friend of mine is yet another tragic story. Her older brother was her best friend and confidant for most of her childhood, but in her teens he got married and it devastated her, because, in her own words, "He no longer saw me as the central female figure in his life." Though to some that may seem like a simple, if not a routine process of life, my friend did not have anyone she could initially turn to who could help her understand and cope with the implications of what had happened.

The result was that she grew into a person who constantly fell prey to relationships with men who remotely reminded her of her brother, going from one destructive and hurtful relationship to another. For years I prayed for her, counseled her, and loved her with all of my heart, but that one critical moment in her life was something that she could never overcome, and even in our own friendship enduring her rollercoaster lifestyle of self-destructive habits caused extreme devastation and harm to my own life.

On Dec. 26, 2006, I lost the friend that I loved more than any other person on this Planet. I felt robbed at the deepest spiritual level and was so broken that even though heart was full of tears, I could not bring myself to cry.

As a former pastor, I could go on about the countless other individuals close to me who died, whose families were destroyed, who fell into drugs, who were imprisoned or who lost everything or destroyed someone else's everything, but all of you know better than I how one moment in time, one flawed decision, or one moment of rejection can trigger a series of tragedies.

All of this can be summarized in one sentence: hurt people will hurt people. That is why compassion is a value that cannot be forgotten. Though one person may not necessarily be enough to save one person, an entire community of people living, breathing, and operating in compassion towards one another will definitely make a difference. If people only expect rejection, betrayal, or benign neglect (meaning nobody cares one way or the other whether you live, die, succeed, or fail) they are more prone to engage in destructive behaviors toward themselves and others.

After all, what is the point of living if nobody cares? If all of us make it a point to care for one another and keep caring for one another, I dare say that many of our problems would immediately vanish away: less people would be on medication for depression, sleep disorders and high blood pressure, fewer people would have domestic disputes, there would be less suicides, lower rates of alcoholism and substance abuse, and who knows, maybe even marriages might actually last.

### **Social Duty 3: Live With Love**

Last but not least, we have to live with love. The late President John F. Kennedy said in his famous speech before American University, "Our problems are man made; therefore they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man's reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable, and we believe they can do it again." If we want to make it out

of the twenty-first century and see the twenty-second, Hawaii needs to live with love: love towards ourselves, love towards our family and friends, love toward our neighbors, and even love towards our enemies.

But what exactly is love? Some people define love as a strong feeling of affection. Other people define it with physical activity, such as hugging, cuddling, and kissing someone. We've even gone so far as to qualify love with statements like "true" love, "first" love or even "young" love. Some say that they love their spouses, but they also say that they love broccoli or football -- we have many definitions and uses of the word love, but what exactly is it?

I would like to enter a new definition for love: love is the act of cherishing another person because of an understanding of that individual's uniqueness and rarity. When archeologists were given permission by the king of Naples during the eighteenth century to excavate the city of Pompeii which had been destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, one of the most dramatic findings was a skeleton of a mother embracing the skeleton of her terrified daughter -- they'd been killed holding each other in a corner.

All humans are mortal, meaning that all of us will one day die. But each and every single one of us in the time that we occupy this world has a special calling, complete with individual dreams, hopes, desires, and passions. The temporary and fragile nature of human life is something that we must cherish.

We need to be good to one another and do everything possible to protect the lives of one another. We need to do things that will inspire one another to live and keep on living. We need to live with love. There's several ways that you can live a lifestyle of love.

The first way to love is to reform your vocabulary. We live in a word society where words mean everything. If you don't believe that, just count the number of lawyers we have. The words that we speak have power over our lives and others to build up or destroy, give life or take it away. Too often parents have fallen into the habit of calling their children stupid when they make mistakes, spouses say "I hate you" when the other disappoints them, and the rest of us often say hurtful things to others without even considering the consequences of our actions. This should not be so.

We need to get into the habit of saying words that will energize people to be all that they can be rather than speaking destructive words that will merely assassinate their spirit. The problem that we have is that we've learned that it's cool or chic to say nothing when we should say everything, and we say everything when we should say nothing. People don't like telling other people "thank you" because it hurts their pride, others hate saying "I'm sorry" because then that would mean they were wrong, and still others absolutely can't say "I love you" because then it makes them feel vulnerable. We have to overcome these dysfunctions if we want to live in love.

The second way to love is to exercise generosity -- especially to people who don't deserve it. What disgusts me in particular is the fact that we live in a society where people are offended by generosity. Last Christmas, an online pop psychology article talked about things one shouldn't buy as a present for significant others. The article said not to buy clothes, jewelry, electronics, accessories, gift certificates, and food items, listing a litany of reasons ranging from people feeling emotionally uncomfortable with the implications of a gift to simply not liking them.

A reader sent in a response that was posted in the comments section of the article that said, "What then are we supposed to give someone?" I think that incident perfectly typifies how we have come to live in this twenty-first century: we all think we know what we're not supposed to do, but nobody actually knows what we can do.

My suggestion is to give, give, give, give, give, and keep on giving. Why? Because everything in creation that functions properly gives something: the sun gives light, the clouds give rain, the fruit trees give fruit, the plants exchange carbon dioxide to give oxygen, the cows give milk -- and theoretically speaking, you should be giving love to one another.

One of the places I regularly use as a meeting point for friends and work associates is the Starbucks Coffee located on Kapahulu in Honolulu. On one particular occasion while waiting for someone, I observed a homeless man who was going in and out of the Starbucks just to make use of the free water dispenser. He sat on the tables outside, and nearly everyone there was ashamed of him and nervous of his presence. Everyone was offended by him. But I was offended by the fact that they were offended, so immediately I purchased the largest sandwich Starbucks had to offer and a large cup of ice water, and ran up to the man and said, "Excuse me sir, please accept this." I could feel the eyes of everyone around me staring down at me, but I didn't care: that man was a human being and human beings deserve to be treated with respect, dignity, compassion and love.

While I was in high school, I took a physics class with a girl who lived next door to me in Universal City and constantly gossiped and spread bad reports about me to everyone simply because she hated me without cause. When I wanted to go out with a girl that she knew, she would undermine me by telling that person everything that was wrong with me. When I showed up to class on the first day of school, she called attention to the entire class to me as I walked through the door and said "Oh, no." I never did anything to defraud, defame, or hurt her, but for whatever reason, she simply hated me.

In the course of our semester, she started to have emotional problems and would often show up to class with withdrawn expressions and troubled moods. The problem was that she was going through a breakup with her boyfriend. Even though she had constantly slandered and mistreated me, the fact remained that she was still my next door neighbor and someone who was obviously hurting very bad, so one day I went out and purchased the nicest sympathy card I could find, and I sought out one of her fellow friends in our physics class.

"This is an unsigned card," I said to her friend, "but I'd like you to fill it out and give it to her under your signature, because I know she's going through a difficult breakup. Please don't let her know that I did this."

Her friend agreed, and that afternoon, when she was presented the card in class, she broke down and cried, feeling relieved that someone actually cared enough to give her a card during her time of distress.

The interesting thing to note is that she never knew or found out that I had asked her friend to give her that sympathy card by proxy -- but to me, that didn't matter, because I had exercised the social duty of love. I say these things not to boast or promote myself, but to demonstrate that loving people often requires overcoming their immediate shortcomings and extending to them generosity even when they don't deserve it.

That girl still hates me to this day -- 10 years later.

The third and most important way to live love is to be faithful. For me, that means two things: one, be consistent, dependable and loyal, and second, always operate in faith (belief) that love can change all situations, circumstances, and individuals.

For the elected officials, being faithful means you show up to work and vote when you're called to vote. I asked someone walking the hallways of the Capitol, "If you elected someone, would you want them to show up to work and be present in the building?" The answer I received in reply was quite stunning: "[Expletive] yeah, are you kidding?"

We really need to start holding our elected officials accountable. Missing committee hearings, failing to vote in committee, and failing to be present to vote on the Floor is completely unacceptable. I really believe that every time a representative or senator fails to make quorum in committee or fails to be present either in their office or on the Floor, the people of the State of Hawaii are being defrauded.

How do you think the rest of us would be treated if we consistently showed up late to work or consistently failed to show up to board meetings? We'd be fired. We as a people need to hold our elected officials to a standard of faithfulness in which if they don't show up for us, we don't vote up for them.

The second thing that being faithful means for an elected official is that they cut us some slack when it comes to regulating and taxing us. Government needs to give us space to exercise wisdom, compassion, and love. They need to believe in us, just as the voters believed in them by placing a vote for them. When all we have is law, there is no room left for grace.

For you and I, being faithful means we make ourselves available to be agents of good. If someone needs our help and we are able to give it, we need to give it. Whether it is 3pm or 3am we need to make ourselves available to one another. Being faithful also means we exercise faith by praying for one another and praying for our State. In 1775, the Continental Congress designated a time for prayer in forming a new nation because they recognized that success required faith.

In 1863, Congress adopted a resolution calling for a national day of prayer and fasting. During the Apollo 13 crisis, the U.S. Senate adopted a resolution calling for a national day of prayer, and from Texas to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem to St. Peter's Basilica, people all around the world prayed for the lives of the endangered crew. There is power in prayer, and I believe that if the people of this state will pray in love, we will overcome the disaster we live in.

## Conclusion

Together, we can all make a difference for Hawaii. These three social duties are things that are not difficult to do and are a part of living well and living good. We owe it to one another to use wisdom, to be compassionate, and to live in love. When the people of this State start operating in those three key social duties, we will turn these islands around. It starts with you and me, so let's get to work.

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