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# Anti-PLDC coalition revived by Ige's selection of Ching

By [Richard Borreca](#)

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The links of the chain that toppled Gov. David Ige's appointment of Carleton Ching as director of the Department of Land and Natural Resources were forged by former Gov. Neil Abercrombie.

The bond isn't between Abercrombie and Ige. It was Abercrombie's refusal to hear the protests about the Public Land Development Corp. that molded Hawaii's environmental movement into a potent political force.

Publicist and community activist Scott Foster said Abercrombie's decision to back the PLDC in the face of overwhelming community opposition forced different groups to work together.

"It is easy to plug them all together on something that is seen as the common enemy," said Foster, who is communications director for Hawaii's Thousand Friends.

PLDC was not Abercrombie's idea; it was pushed by state Sen. Donovan Dela Cruz and former Sen. Malama Solomon.

It was the product of a last-minute "gut-and-replace" bill redrafting that gave the public only two hours notice for a public hearing.

That new law rocked the environmental community across the state. Although Abercrombie supported and vocally defended the act, by the end of his term he was obliged to sign a new law repealing the PLDC.

"We started this messaging, telling everyone when hearing dates would be and who to

call, to fight the PLDC," said Foster.

"It exploded and that moved into the Abercrombie election."

Booting Abercrombie the same way they scrapped the PLDC became a rallying point for the environmental movement, Foster says.

The glee in beating Abercrombie was quickly replaced with "buyer's remorse," according to Foster, who said activists were concerned when Ige named political insider Mike McCartney, the former Hawaii Tourist Authority executive director and former head of the Democratic Party and the Hawaii State Teachers Association, as his chief of staff.

"The disenchantment started with his first appointment, Mike McCartney," Foster said.

Both McCartney and Robbie Alm, the former Hawaiian Electric executive vice president helping Ige, refused to talk on the record about their efforts to secure Ching's nomination.

The nomination of Ching, a land developer lobbyist with longstanding connections to the development community, ignited a group that was questioning its support for Ige.

"It was a huge mobilization. It used to need sophisticated means to bring people together. Now it is just done with average people on Facebook," Foster said.

Marti Townsend is an attorney and executive director of the Outdoor Circle. Townsend said local environmentalists were focusing on better organization and the Ching battle just made it easier.

"We were surprised at the choice of Ching. Each group assessed the choice and those of us able to take a public stand did," Townsend said in an interview.

"We would discuss the issues and talk about who needed to be met with and how we would do public education," she said.

The campaign had to be thorough but not intimidating, Townsend said.

"We had to have an understanding what are the interests of elected officials and how to approach them to explain our concerns," she said. "We didn't talk about retribution. We talked about the issues."

Senators like veteran Sen. Suzanne Chun Oakland, who said she would have voted against Ching if Ige had not pulled back the nomination, said the community groups were a key part of the effort.

"A lot of people who don't usually get involved with the Legislature were coming forward in this matter. I got 1,000 emails, and 800 of them were before I had a chance to meet with Mr. Ching," Chun Oakland said.

The takeaway on this campaign comes from Townsend, who understands the power of Hawaii's environmental lobby.

"We have gotten better at recognizing the value of our collective effort, and can put it to use," Townsend said.

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