

CIVIL BEAT EDITORIAL

Are We Willing To Accept A D+ In Public Integrity?

Guided by the right values, we can set a standard for public integrity as strong as our standard for tourism excellence. And we can do it in 2016.

NOVEMBER 13, 2015 • By The Civil Beat Editorial Board 

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Was anyone really cheering when news came out this week that Hawaii ranks [among the nation's top four states](#) with regard to anti-corruption laws? Probably not. Our overall grade was a lousy D+, and there's little satisfaction in being just slightly less awful at this than 46 other states.

The anti-corruption report cards are a project of the Pulitzer-winning Center for Public Integrity, which undertakes analysis of public service, government accountability and ethics-related issues.

The grade actually represents a [decline from Hawaii's grade of C](#) in the center's last state-by-state analysis, in 2012. But that grade, ironically, ranked the state 13th nationally. The difference between the two evaluations is as slight as the grades suggest. Hawaii didn't so much move up in the rankings as slide down less than other states whose leaders apparently care even less about corruption and public integrity.

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Hawaii earned a D+ for anti-corruption laws this year from the Center for Public Integrity. Sadly, that was one of the best grades for any state in the nation.

The shortfalls driving such low marks won't surprise regular Civil Beat readers. Hawaii earned its lowest marks — F's — in judicial accountability and lobbying disclosure. It fared little better in electoral oversight and legislative accountability, with a D- in each category.

Center evaluators drew attention to such issues as:

- The lack of conflict-of-interest laws placing employment restrictions on judges after they step down from the bench.
- The absence of independent audits of lobbying disclosure records.
- The fact that state lawmakers rarely recuse themselves from actions in which they may have a conflict of interest.

These and other shortcomings predispose our governmental processes to abuse by crooks. Proposals to fix these problems are put regularly on the desks of state legislators, as they were earlier this year. But clearly, not enough lawmakers care whether Hawaii is, or is seen as, corrupt. So getting reforms through committee assignments and in front of House and Senate members for full consideration is a rarity.

The State Ethics Commission introduced a package of nine bills with House and Senate versions last session. Not one passed.

“The State Ethics Commission introduced a package of nine bills with House and Senate versions,” reported [Civil Beat columnist Ian Lind](#) last May, continuing in what has become a familiar refrain: “Not a single one was passed.”

Even when lawmakers seemingly address ethical loopholes, those efforts may be quietly blunted deep in the bowels of the Capitol, far from the prying eyes of media and the public.

As Civil Beat editorialized earlier this year, for instance, Hawaii’s lobbying laws appear to require lobbyists to disclose their clients, how much they’re being paid and who else is involved in their work. But lawmakers created a big, fat loophole so that the disclosure requirements really only pertain to those lobbying the Legislature. Lobbyists seeking to influence the executive branch are only required to disclose activities that directly influence the adoption or amendment of agency rules. If the lobbying pertains to big-ticket contracts or procurement within the governor’s administration — issues where big money and jobs are often on the table — [lobbyists are off the hook](#), no disclosure required.

Aloha, Pono And The Challenge for 2016

Hawaii invests millions each year in burnishing its image as the “Aloha State,” a place where our regard for warm, welcoming hospitality makes our tourism brand among the most valuable in the world.

Pono is a Hawaiian word that gets far less attention. It translates to righteousness, honesty, truth and transparency and a variety of related meanings. Someone who is acting in a pono manner is said to be “doing the right thing.”

Pono is a value that sorely needs to be infused into Hawaii’s anti-corruption laws. Imagine if we agreed that it’s just as important to our islands’ character as aloha is to tourism that our public institutions and officials were governed by laws ensuring they operates in an honest, transparent, righteous manner. Imagine if we consistently held

the actions of officials and institutions — regardless of political or partisan philosophy, or economic point of view — to the most pono of standards.

Gov. David Ige and state legislators ought to take this year's D+ as a challenge. The package of bills from the State Ethics Commission are as ripe for passage now as they were last spring.

It's an opportunity in some ways uniquely available to Hawaii. Our tourism industry and beautiful environment already set international standards for excellence. It's the ethical standards to which we hold our elected and appointed officials and public institutions that are dramatically out of synch with an A+ brand.

Gov. David Ige and state legislators ought to take this year's D+ as a challenge. The package of bills from the State Ethics Commission are as ripe for passage now as they were last spring — as are other measures from the Campaign Spending Commission, the Office of Elections and the Office of Information Practices that similarly went nowhere last year.

The 2016 legislative session opens in a little more than two months, and lawmakers will face battalions of individuals, governmental departments and interest groups looking for money from a state general fund already stretched thin. Passing anti-corruption reforms comparatively would cost almost nothing, save minor staff investments here and there to ensure enforcement and compliance.

Let's not accept our D+ as just another grade or ranking. Unlike other less desirable realities of our state (cost of living, home prices, traffic), these laws and policies require remarkably little effort to change. With pono as our guiding value, 2016 can be the year where we set a new standard around public ethics, one befitting our state, one that Hawaii truly deserves.

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Patricia Blair · University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Many thanks for stating and encouraging the right course. The question no doubt is whether corruption is to much an accepted way of life. To many times I have had people born here, locals, suggest that a direct approach for change, challenging someone's actions, someone's beliefs is not the way it's done. Of course that is exactly why corruption continues.

Like · Reply ·  3 · Nov 13, 2015 7:43am



Makoto Lane

The non-confrontational approach gets nothing accomplished. More Dissonence, less bowing down.

Like · Reply ·  1 · Nov 14, 2015 11:40am · Edited



Walter Ritte

UA MAU KE EA (Sovereignty Endures) O KA AINA I KA PONO.
With out PONO there is no EA (Government).

Like · Reply ·  1 · Nov 13, 2015 10:01am



Ed Wagner

Walter Ritte: I wish you could help organize 10,000 people to march to and rally at the Capitol for the opening session of the Legislature to demand more integrity, social and economic justice, and energy justice in the form of community owned, non-profit power instead of more monopoly power for another 100 years from either HEI or Next Terror/Error

[facebook.com/StopHeco](https://www.facebook.com/StopHeco)

Like · Reply · Nov 13, 2015 8:35pm



Ed Wagner

"But clearly, not enough lawmakers care whether Hawaii is, or is seen as, corrupt"



but clearly, not enough lawmakers care whether Hawaii is, or is seen as, corrupt.

That's because they are corrupt themselves. That's what the people get for supporting a corrupt Democrat monopoly government since Statehood.

Like · Reply · 2 · Nov 13, 2015 2:49pm



Patricia Blair · University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Ed, corrupt ness has no party exclusiveness, but , yes the situation reflects poorly on the Democratic Party.

Like · Reply · Nov 14, 2015 11:49am



Henry Commons

What does tourism have to do with corruption? Tourist could care less about the corrupt fake state.

Since the first tourist landed (Cook) there have been corruption to our political system. Must be some Eastern political system.

Like · Reply · Nov 14, 2015 11:04am



Makoto Lane

Rep.James Tokioka caught!

<http://www.disappearednews.com/.../report-reveals-details...>

Like · Reply · 1 · Nov 14, 2015 11:38am · Edited

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