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Capitol Watch: Nov. 22

By Chad Blair CONNECT | 11/22/2010

Welcome to Capitol Watch. Governor-Elect [Neil Abercrombie](#) is in transition mode, there's new leadership at the Legislature and other government branches, and Civil Beat is reporting on all of it.



Chad Blair/Civil Beat

6:16 p.m. Lingle In Oil

Before a packed room of her supporters, **Linda Lingle** unveiled her official portrait — all 36 by 48 inches of it.

The painting, by artist **Christy Fujii**, will now join the pantheon of other Hawaii governors in the executive chambers on the Capitol's fifth floor.

Supporters — her cabinet, her lieutenant governor, GOP lawmakers et al. as well as students and teachers — packed Washington Place for the unveiling, which was emceed by **Michael W. Perry** and sponsored by the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts and the Board of the Friends of Hawaii Robotics.

1:25 p.m. Santa's Little Helpers

Neil Abercrombie, **Duke Aiona** and **Peter Carlisle** donned red aprons and wielded tiny bells to help **The Salvation Army** drum up donations for those in need during the holidays.

The annual red-kettle kickoff was held at Tamarind Park in Bishop Square in downtown Honolulu.

No joke: After making a donation, Abercrombie told folks gathered for the event that **Civil Beat** would no doubt soon be publishing the names of public officials and their charitable contributions.

11:01 a.m. Dear Legislators: Please Be Transparent

A varied group of 18 citizens organizations has sent a letter to every lawmaker at the Capitol calling for legislative process changes that would make the Legislature more open and accessible.

The letter, which **Common Cause Hawaii** has posted [here](#), asks that more legislative hearings be broadcast on the Web, that at least three business days be given for hearings notices and that proposed bill amendments be posted online ASAP.

"As you know, our organizations care deeply about improving public participation in government," the letter says in part. "We commend the Legislature for improvements in public access in recent years. However, we feel there is a lot more that needs to be done."

The 18 groups include leading local environmental and civil liberties groups, **AARP Hawaii**, **Kanu Hawaii** and the **Grassroot Institute**.

9:45 a.m. Free Roger Christie Before Thanksgiving!

A "scholar" with the [California Cannabis Ministry](#) has penned a [letter](#) to **Neil Abercrombie** asking him to ask **Linda Lingle** to pardon the Big Island's **Roger Christie**.

[Christie](#), a reverend with the THC ministry that believes marijuana is a religious sacrament, has been awaiting trial since July at the Honolulu Federal Detention Center on charges of pot possession and trafficking.

"As the responsible person in Hawaii for defending both State and Federal Constitutions, and their First Amendments in particular, I am asking you to convey this request to Governor Lingle before Thanksgiving, in order

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to achieve unity on behalf of the Law of the Land, in a bi-partisan call for Roger's release," wrote **Paul J. von Hartmann** in a letter dated Sunday. "You must be aware that due process has been suspended in your State. In denying Reverend Christie a fair trial before imprisoning him the foundations of freedom have been suspended by a failed drug war."

Illinois Weighs Civil Unions Bill

While Hawaii must wait until its new governor is sworn in and the Legislature convenes Jan. 19, Illinois is poised to become the next state to legalize civil unions for same-sex couples — possibly as early as [this month](#).

The Chicago Tribune [reports](#) that the state's just-elected Democratic governor, a Republican U.S. senator-elect, both chambers of the state General Assembly and a [majority](#) of residents support the legislation.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, only New Jersey currently [allows](#) civil unions, though in Connecticut, Vermont and New Hampshire, same-sex marriage has replaced civil unions. Statewide law provides "nearly all state-level spousal rights to unmarried couples (domestic partnerships)" in California, Oregon, Nevada and Washington.


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