

Common Cause Hawaii dismisses public interest in special session - Hawaii News - Honolulu Star-Advertiser

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By Marcus R. Oshiro

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What happened to Common Cause Hawaii?

How can it coldly dismiss the public sentiment and congratulate the Legislature for a special session that many considered a dog-and-pony show?

Common Cause Hawaii failed to appreciate the sacrifice each person made to participate in the legislative process ("[Work to improve public access at the Legislature](#)," Star-Advertiser, Island Voices, Nov. 20). Allowing another voice to give one's testimony should have been a small concession allowed for this "unprecedented" special session.

Why could U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz's wife be his proxy but Uncle Joe couldn't read Auntie May's testimony? Why could U.S. Rep. Colleen Hanabusa's friend get to read her testimony and also testify personally again later — but sorry, no can, Auntie Sue?



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Shouldn't everyone's views be considered equally, or should the Legislature just listen to the "big shots"?

Likewise, describing the whole two minutes of testimony at the hearings as "excellent" because of the time constraints and volume of testimony received is preposterous and counter to the basic notion that government should be responsive to the people.

First, there were no time constraints placed on the Legislature. We had up to 45 days and could have stayed in session until Christmas; we used barely 12.

Second, the volume of testimony is reflective of the public's interest and we as legislators should have adjusted our schedules to fit the demands of the people — not restrict the public's ability to make their views known. Again, with so much time, what was the rush?

Third, and most importantly, why conduct a public hearing at all if the outcome is known beforehand?

Despite hearing more than 50 hours of testimony from thousands of people, and receiving more than 28,000 documents — the equivalent of more than 30 reams of paper — the joint House Committee on Judiciary and Finance came to a decision in less than two hours. Can anyone honestly say they actually read through everything that was submitted?

That's why people view this special session as shibai. And that's what makes Common Cause Hawaii's commentary so disturbing.

That Common Cause Hawaii gave its stamp of approval when it wrote that "we ... did not see any glaring procedure violations" tells me that only "blinding" irregularities will be seen as violation of the public interest.

Or maybe Common Cause Hawaii chose to turn a blind eye on a measure it supported despite the lack of genuine public engagement, transparency and accountability.

If this is Common Cause Hawaii's new standards for best practices, it really needs to bring back Larry Meacham, its former executive director. After all, someone needs to represent the interests of the people.

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