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Ethics Panel OKs Free Tix to APEC Events — Again

By Nanea Kalani | 10/19/2011

The [Hawaii State Ethics Commission](#) on Wednesday reaffirmed that it's OK for lawmakers to accept free tickets to parties and events at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit next month.

The commission at its September meeting had already [given legislators the green light](#) in response to a request from Tim Johns, vice chair of the [APEC Hawaii Host Committee](#). Johns had asked Ethics Commission Executive Director [Les Kondo](#) for an opinion on the "appropriateness" of offering to pay for lawmakers to attend four events, one of which is valued at \$375¹.



flickr: [stevendepolo](#)

Honolulu will host the APEC conference between Nov. 7 and 13. Dignitaries from 21 Asia-Pacific nations, including President Barack Obama, are expected to attend.

At Wednesday's monthly meeting, the commission heard concerns from Common Cause Hawaii Executive Director Nikki Love about tickets.

Love raised concerns about the high value of the tickets in light of an Ethics Commission ruling earlier this year that lawmakers [could not accept](#) gifts of \$200-per-person tickets to a Hawaii Institute for Public Affairs (HIPA) fundraiser.

That ruling became a catalyst for lawmakers' efforts to [water down](#) Hawaii's gift law, including

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allowing legislators to accept "charitable gifts" from labor unions and business groups. The attempts ultimately failed.

Ethics commissioners said they approved of the APEC tickets because of the donor — the APEC Hawaii Host Committee — as well as the perceived public benefit of having lawmakers appear at those events.

1. The price for the Asia-Pacific Business Symposium was dropped this week from \$750, after organizers received funding from the host committee and community leaders to help cover the costs. ↩

In addition to the high dollar value, Love said she wondered how community members who are critical of APEC would view the free tickets. She also said that while the host committee is a nonprofit, that some members are lobbyists or work for companies that lobby the Hawaii Legislature.

"For all legislators to be able to go to all of the events sounds like a lot," she told commissioners.

Commission Chairwoman Maria Sullivan reiterated that the panel feels there is a strong public benefit to lawmakers attending the APEC events.

"Looking at the state benefit, if participation in these events would help that person perform their job better, the dollar amount becomes secondary," Kondo said. "It's not always secondary, but in this case it became secondary because of the state benefit."

Commissioner Edward Broglio agreed, describing the events as a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to interface with other governments."

DISCUSSION: *Do you agree with the Ethics Commission's decision?*

 1  1   2

Discussion



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LJ Bates III · Kalapana, Hawaii

Our elected officials are already BOUGHT and PAID for by business interests...they may vote on the "correct" side of the issues, but they are BUT ONE COG in the Corporate/Commerce Machine that is BROKEN! Commerce in Hawaii began through bribes and "free"

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gifts...ALWAYS with strings attached...this is just MORE OF THE SAME! I wonder what pro-business legislation will come out of this...WE WILL BE WATCHING!

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Dave Smith · News Editor at Big Island Now

Why is this event getting special treatment? I'm sure there are lots of other events where there would be a "perceived public benefit of having lawmakers attending." The ethics laws are there for a good reason -- to prevent lawmakers from receiving breaks and benefits not available to the general public, and they should be strictly followed. If the "perceived public benefit" is so great, the lawmakers should purchase the tickets.

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Dennis Tynan · ★ Top Commenter

Mahalo, Common Cause for pointing out how wrong this is.

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Nancy Aleck · Honolulu, Hawaii

slippery slope, lots of grease on this one!

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