

Hawaii

# Gabbard Rakes In Far More Campaign Cash Than Hanabusa

The latest federal campaign finance reports indicate very different strategies by Hawaii's congresswomen, and reinforce the notion Hanabusa may run for governor.

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By Chad Blair    / July 20, 2017

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Both are Democrats representing Hawaii in Congress, but Reps. Tulsi Gabbard and Colleen Hanabusa could not be more different when it comes to campaign fundraising.

Gabbard, who represents the neighbor islands and rural Oahu, has \$2.1 million in cash, having raised almost a quarter of a million dollars from April 1 to June 30.

She also returned \$11,200 to political action committees, in keeping with her pledge in May to no longer accept PAC money. But Gabbard has raised \$1.3 million in PAC money since her first election in 2012, according to

[OpenSecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org), and it's not clear whether she has any of it left or plans to return any more of it.



Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, left, is raking in the campaign cashing and returning some PAC donations. Rep. Colleen Hanabusa has raised very little money lately.

Hanabusa raised barely \$62,000 during the same April-June time period and has only \$220,000 in cash on hand.

Given that serious candidates for Hawaii seats in the U.S. House of Representatives typically spend more than \$1 million in elections (as Hanabusa did in her 2012 and 2016 campaigns), her meager war chest could give rise to more rumors that the job she is really interested in is governor of Hawaii.

The latest finance data, posted this week with the [Federal Election Commission](#), comes at the same time that Hanabusa has gotten into an online spat with Gov. David Ige.

[A new national poll](#) found Ige's approval rating in Hawaii well below that of most governors.

## Fundraising In Low Gear

Brittany Ross, who coordinates fundraising for Hanabusa, said neither the congresswoman nor her chief of staff, Mike Formby, could be reached for comment.

But Ross, who was paid about \$20,000 from Hanabusa's campaign for consulting and fundraising services, acknowledged that her boss has done little in the way of fundraising.

She said that Hanabusa has been focused on her work with the [Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee](#), something that comes as part of Hanabusa's duties as class representative for new legislators.

Hanabusa, who previously served two terms in the House, was [named to the party post](#) by Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi.

Hanabusa actually spent more money — \$98,671 — in the second quarter than she took in.

The biggest recipient at \$43,500 was the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Ross said the payments were for quarterly dues.



Anthony Quintano/Civil Beat

Hanabusa at a town hall in Honolulu in April. Will she challenge Gov. David Ige?

Hanabusa also contributed several thousand dollars to five congressional candidates in other states.

Most of the congresswoman's contributions came from PACs, including defense contractors (Northrop Grumman gave \$7,500), air carrier interests (United Airlines donated \$2,000) and labor groups (the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers contributed \$10,000).

Individual donations to her campaign totaled a modest \$7,118.

Nearly \$10,000 of Hanabusa's expenditures went to Virginia-based Fiorello Consulting, most of it for fundraising advice. A number of members of Congress have worked with Fiorello, including the late Hawaii Congressman Mark Takai.

Takai also paid campaign money [to Crossroads Consulting](#) of Washington, D.C., as did Hanabusa in her recent FEC filing — specifically, more than \$12,000 for field data, web and email maintenance.

And Hanabusa spent almost \$1,000 for catering at a fundraising event at the Hotel George in Washington.

While no high-caliber Democrat, Republican or independent has emerged to challenge Hanabusa in 2018 — and the primary is barely a year away — her low campaign cash suggests the congresswoman either feels confident of her re-election chances or she has an eye on leaving Congress.

Money raised for federal elections cannot be used for state races, and vice-versa.

## Returning PAC Money

Gabbard, by contrast, looks very much like a candidate seeking re-election or possibly thinking of future races for other federal offices, as has long been speculated.

She has already said she will not challenge U.S. Sen. Mazie Hirono next year — Gabbard endorsed the senator and helped raise money for her.

Gabbard gets most of her money from individual donors, but she still received about 7 percent of her campaign funds from PACs in [the most recent election cycle](#).

Her second quarter filing, however, showed her returning the money, which came from the likes of the American Association for Justice, Ernst & Young, Bank of Hawaii and Saltchuk Resources, which has several local business, including Young Brothers.



Gabbard at a town hall in Honolulu in April. She's raising far more campaign money than Hanabusa.

Top PACs that have donated to Gabbard over the course of her federal career included Hawaii-based Navatek (\$32,210), the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (\$30,520) and the National Automobile Dealers Association.

Like Hanabusa, Gabbard has no declared challengers for next year. But, as [a Civil Beat Poll showed](#), her approval rating has recently dropped significantly.

Gabbard is spending a lot of her money to help her campaign.

The Campaign Finance Group of D.C. was paid \$11,000 in the recent quarter, while Batrice & Associates of Dallas picked up \$9,000 for political consulting and GMMB Communications Consulting got \$5,120.

Revolution Messaging, also of Washington and specializing in internet advertising and services, received \$29,400.

One unexplained expenditure for Gabbard: \$18,662 to [Denton US](#) for legal services. Denton, which has a K Street address in Washington, is a global law firm.

## Dueling Emails

The kerfuffle between Hanabusa and Ige appears to have started Wednesday with a column on the Huffington Post website.

Hawaii resident Robert Wintner, owner of the [Snorkel Bob's](#) ocean-sports business, wrote that Hanabusa told Ige that she might [run against him next year](#).

Wintner's source was identified as an Ige policy advisor, and the information came in the context of Hanabusa urging Ige to veto a bill to limit aquarium fishing. Wintner [supported the bill](#), which the governor [vetoed last week](#).

Later Wednesday, Formby issued [a lengthy statement](#) denying that Hanabusa knew either Wintner or Ige's aide, Brandon Asuka, and had not spoken with them "with matters relating to SB 1240 and/or her potential to challenge Governor Ige."

The statement concludes this way:

*"Congresswoman Hanabusa also respectfully requests Governor Ige's office refrain from using her name and/or her potential to challenge Governor Ige with respect to any official discussion regarding executive decisions of the Governor's office."*

And here is how Ige's office responded in an email from spokeswoman Jodi Leong:

*"Neither Gov. Ige nor anyone on his staff had any conversation with Congresswoman Hanabusa or anyone on her staff regarding SB 1240 relating*

*to aquarium collector permits in Hawaii or campaign issues.*

*Gov. Ige is committed to introducing legislation and/or administrative rules that will properly address concerns about aquarium fishing and create policy that will establish Hawaii as the best managed sustainable nearshore fishery in the world.”*

Whether all this amounts to the first salvos in a Democratic primary contest for governor or just some internet sensitivities remains to be seen.

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