




HONOLULU

Gifts Given to Honolulu Officials Remain Under Wraps

Ethics rules require state officials to file mandatory gift disclosure forms every year. That's not the case for the City and County of Honolulu.

SEPTEMBER 18, 2015 • By Nick Grube   

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Hawaii Gov. David Ige has been showered with thousands of dollars worth of gifts since taking over the top floor of the State Capitol from Neil Abercrombie.

In May, Shinso Ito, head priest of Shinnyo-en and this year's officiate for the Lantern Floating Hawaii event at Ala Moana Beach Park, gave the governor a Gucci toiletry bag worth \$450.

Japan's consul general, Toyoei Shigeeda, added to the largesse with nail clippers, a file and "luxurious scissors" that together carried a price tag of \$990. Ige was also bestowed a \$294 Sailor Pen from Hidehiko Yuzaki, the governor of Hiroshima.

Flickr: JD Hancock



Several local lawmakers and government officials have been accused of violating various ethics laws related to gifts in recent months.

All these gifts, which the governor puts on display or into state storage, are detailed in [public documents](#) posted on the Hawaii State Ethics Commission [website](#), along with annual disclosures from other lawmakers and officials who hold prominent positions in government.

But don't expect to find any similar accounting from Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell, the City Council or anyone else who works for the municipality unless they do it voluntarily.

In fact, [Honolulu Ethics Commission](#) Executive Director Chuck Totto says it's been more than a decade since the city ethics law required officials to publicly disclose the gifts they've received.

"The city used to have that requirement, but in 2002 the law was changed," Totto said. "There

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is no legal requirement that any city official maintain the records of gifts that they receive, which is different from the state.”



Antiquated Law Spares Lobbyists in Honolulu Ethics Scandal

JUNE 1, 2015

Honolulu enacted a \$200 cap on gifts in 2002.

Under that law, city officials cannot receive more than \$200 worth of gifts from a single source in a given year.

The requirement to disclose gifts was removed from the ethics code at that time, based on the assumption that no one would self-report a violation, Totto said.

“It’s a rare person who expects to be wined and dined, and who thinks of it as one of the perks of the office.”

Now, officials are [allowed to accept gifts](#) worth up to \$200 so long as the donor doesn’t have an interest in city business that can be influenced by the recipient.

But Totto said city officials might still receive gifts under \$200 that could result in ethics violations.

He said the test in such circumstances is whether “a reasonable member of the public would believe that the gift was meant to influence or reward the city employee for doing their work.”

The lack of mandatory gift reporting creates a significant blind spot, since it makes it nearly impossible to track who might be trying to influence the city’s top officials.

Ill-gotten gifts have embroiled several current and former city council members in a scandal that threatens to undermine dozens of votes they took on critical measures, including those related to Honolulu’s \$6 billion rail project.

Former Councilman Romy Cachola agreed to pay [a \\$50,000 fine](#) to the Ethics Commission last September after it was discovered that he had accepted thousands of dollars in gifts from lobbyists with ties to developers and labor unions but failed to disclose the gifts before voting on measures the lobbyists had an interest in.

But he has said he's not the only council member who was not reporting gifts from lobbyists.

Cachola, who is now a state representative, said former council members Donovan Dela Cruz, Todd Apo and Nestor Garcia also received went to fancy dinners with lobbyists that they didn't report.

Current council members Ann Kobayashi and Ikaika Anderson were accused of similar conduct by Cachola.

The Honolulu Ethics Commission has launched an investigation into Cachola's allegations, and has [fined Garcia \\$8,100](#) for accepting gifts from lobbyists that he didn't report.



Gov. David Ige has received \$5,802.20 worth of gifts since he was elected, according to documents filed with the Hawaii State Ethics Commission.

While it's doubtful mandatory gift disclosures would have caught the wrongdoing — it's based on self-reporting, after all — Totto still encourages employees to keep an eye on themselves.

He says he tells city workers and politicians to track their gifts independently so they can avoid a violation of the city's ethics law. He also encourages anyone to contact his office if they have any doubts.

"If you want to keep your nose clean, it's an easy way to help yourself," Totto said. "I don't think these folks want to violate the law. It's a rare person who expects to be

wined and dined, and who thinks of it as one of the perks of the office.”

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2 Comments

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**Ed Wagner**

Out of an abundance of caution, and to begin to regain public confidence and trust in our currently totally crooked and corrupt government, why not keep it simple.....

NO gifts of ANY kind and of any value can be given to ANYONE in public office unless those gifts come from an immediate family member for birthday, Christmas, and similar occasion OR if the gift is accepted by a person in public office on behalf of the public and appropriately and permanently displayed as such, and not used by, maintained in the home of, or sold by that public official.

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**John Kawamoto**

Performing the duties of an elected government official is a public service. Gifts are unnecessary.

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**Natalie Iwasa, Community Advocate**

I like simplicity, but I don't think it's as easy as that. For example, we have a lot of different cultural influences here, and for some people, gift giving is just part of how they live. Rejecting those types of gifts may be considered disrespectful.

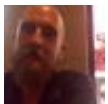
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**Ed Wagner**

Natalie Iwasa, Community Advocate I didn't say reject the gift outright. Just accept it on behalf of Hawaii & display it publicly

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**Alfred Caley** · Waianae, Hawaii

U know what all the gifts would help out the houseless

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