



April 18, 2016 | 🌤️ 74° | 🚗 Check Traffic

Hawaii News

Kondo tapped for auditor job

By [Kevin Dayton](#)

Posted April 16, 2016

April 16, 2016

Les Kondo, the aggressive and sometimes embattled executive director of the state Ethics Commission, will now have an opportunity to dramatically broaden his scope to scrutinize the finances and operations of the entire state administration as the new Hawaii state auditor.

Lawmakers have scheduled a rare joint session of the House and Senate next week for a vote to confirm Kondo to an eight-year term as auditor. Also up for confirmation will be Robin Matsunaga to a six-year term as state ombudsman, and Charlotte Carter-Yamauchi as director of the Legislative Reference Bureau.

Kondo's nomination to an agency controlled by the state Legislature is surprising because he has clashed repeatedly with a number of lawmakers in his role with the Ethics Commission, most notably with House Speaker Joseph Souki.

Kondo angered some legislators when he told them they couldn't accept free tickets from lobbyists to attend charitable fundraisers, and enforced prohibitions against state employees accepting free golf outings and other gifts.

He also triggered a furor last year when he declared that teachers may not accept free travel from tour companies on educational trips they organize for their students.

Souki (D, Waihee-Waiehu-Wailuku) wrote to the ethics commissioners last year to criticize commission staff under Kondo for "rewriting the Ethics Code" by prohibiting once-common practices such as charitable fundraising at the Legislature and other state venues.

When asked about Kondo's appointment Friday, Souki said lawmakers had an internal agreement that Souki would choose the state ombudsman, Senate President Ron Kouichi would select the auditor and they would make a joint decision on hiring the head of the Legislative Reference Bureau.

Souki said he reviewed Kondo's background and concurred with his appointment, and "I believe he has the capability. I have no problem. I've met with him a few times even prior to this appointment, and think we reached some understanding."

Of his differences with Kondo, "that's all in the past," Souki said. Kondo's new role will have him focusing his audits and reports "entirely" on the administration and not on the Legislature, Souki said.

Kondo has served as executive director of the Ethics Commission since 2011, but last year the five-member commission had rated him as only "average" overall, and the commission was considering whether to remove him from the job.

Kondo, who is a lawyer, served as a commissioner of the Public Utilities Commission before joining the Ethics Commission. He also headed the state Office of Information Practices from 2003 to 2007.

Assuming he is confirmed, Kondo would replace acting state Auditor Jan Yamane.

The auditor's position was created in 1950 to help eliminate government waste and inefficiency, ensure that public funds are spent as lawmakers intended, and serve as a check against the powers of the executive branch.

Matsunaga has been director of the Office of Ombudsman since 1998, and has been nominated for another six-year term. The ombudsman investigates complaints from the public about state and county executive-branch agencies.

Matsunaga previously worked for 12 years in the state Legislature serving as a House Finance Committee budget analyst, and later as chief of staff for Souki.

Carter-Yamauchi has been acting director of the Legislative Reference Bureau since 2010. She started with the bureau as a research attorney, was named assistant director for research in 2003 and was appointed first assistant in 2008.

Carter-Yamauchi also worked in private practice, and served as a Honolulu deputy prosecuting attorney. If approved by lawmakers, she will be appointed to a six-year term.

The Legislative Reference Bureau is a nonpartisan agency that provides a wide variety of research and other services to legislators, legislative committees and in some cases members of the public.

If approved by lawmakers Friday in the joint session, all three candidates will start their terms May 1.

