



## Lawmakers, critics debate legislative transparency

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HONOLULU (AP) -- Hawaii leaders say one of the highlights of the 2013 legislative session was greater transparency in the lawmaking process.

But advocacy groups like Common Cause and the League of Women Voters, along with more critical legislators, say a lot more needs to be done to make Hawaii's legislative process clearer and more accessible to the public.

The Legislature passed eight of 18 bills specifically criticized by watchdog groups after being passed with unrelated amendments or with largely new language compared with how the measures were introduced.

Common Cause, the League of Women Voters and other organizations say the public wasn't given enough time to testify on the measures because of the way lawmakers changed the bills.

In one case, a bill was introduced to repeal the state's transportation commission. The final version also bans businesses that apply wheel boots to cars. Critics say the bill will cause people to lose jobs and favors the tow truck industry.

In another instance, a proposal was intended to clarify the process of giving legal notice to someone about court proceedings. But the final draft expands the requirements for people on the Native Hawaiian Roll Commission.

Janet Mason of the League of Women Voters says the group objects to the process by which the bills were crafted, not their contents.

She said in some cases, lawmakers deleted a bill's contents entirely and added completely new information. In other instances, legislators tacked on unrelated amendments.

Mason says the tactics confuse the public and allow lawmakers to sneak in proposals without adequate public scrutiny.

Lawmakers themselves say some problems come because they're trying to work quickly in a session that lasts less than five months and presents committees with a heavy workload.

At one point during this year's session, Sen. Sam Slom criticized Sen. Clayton Hee for asking members of the Senate Judiciary Committee to vote on a bill to amend a journalists' shield law without showing them the amendments beforehand.

Hee said the committee was dealing with more than 400 bills and that senators would have a chance to see the bill before voting on the Senate floor.

"The vast majority of bills are decided in a way which the time does not allow us the ability to write all of the amendments of all of the bills," Hee said. "We were literally still drafting the bill at the time the hearing was being held. That is not the exception but the rule."

The advocacy groups were successful at shutting down several bills, including a measure that would have allowed more geothermal energy development in Hawaii. The proposal passed the House as a bill about the Native Hawaiian Roll Commission but was expanded in the Senate.

Sen. Les Ihara introduced a proposal at the beginning of the session that would have limited such drastic changes to bills. Although his bill was largely ignored, Ihara says lawmakers were better at sticking to the rules this year and "straight dealing" rather than getting involved in

political maneuvers.

Critics of the legislative process say that problems with transparency aren't limited to bill amendments.

Carmille Lim of Common Cause Hawaii says more needs to be done to consistently broadcast legislative hearings and hold legislators accountable.

Senate President Donna Mercado Kim said she did remind lawmakers of the rules about amending bills several times this session. In response to advocacy groups' concerns, she has formed a committee to study the issue and make recommendations.

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## 1 comment



If we had listened to the League of Women Voters when the Dem and Rep National parties took away their participation in the election process, we would not have near the problems we have today... likely several of our Presidents would not have made office for sure.

Mike D, Wednesday, May 8, 2013

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