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Editorial | On Politics

Legislature nears finish with big issues unresolved

By [Richard Borreca](#)

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It is time for the state Legislature to flip into its Red Zone offense if it wants to use the two remaining weeks left to pull together a list of accomplishments.

The session ends May 7, but everything has to be on deck by May 1. Most of the state's big issues looming from January are still just that, big looming issues.

For instance, the announced \$4.3 billion purchase of homegrown Hawaiian Electric by Florida-base NextEra Energy is still chugging along without the Legislature putting a fingerprint on the deal.

Gov. David Ige appointed a reliable Democratic former politician, Randy Iwase, to head the Public Utilities Commission. So far Iwase has appeared to be an active, consumer-oriented chairman. Hawaii's rooftop solar business has been cheered by Iwase's negotiations with HECO, which led to HECO promises to speed up solar installation permits.

There is nothing to report so far as the Legislature giving the PUC direction to lay down strict guidance for the HECO buyout to result in consumer-friendly, energy independent power producers.

What to do about giving the city money to pay for its over-budget train is still up in the air, with legislative speculation that any last-minute guidance from Ige will be determinative. In other words, if Ige says he thinks it is needed, it will pass; if he threatens a veto, it may disappear.

Another open-ended budget item is what to do about the Hawaii Health Systems Corp., the financially battered institution running Hawaii's public hospitals. Attached to that problem is the quickly deteriorating financial situation on Maui, where administrators are threatening big layoffs if they are not able to join forces with a private health provider. The inability of the Legislature to ease something past the politically potent HGEA, whose members staff the hospitals, is the big reason nothing has happened so far.

House Speaker Joe Souki started the session by again arguing for an updated medical marijuana dispensary law and there are indications that some consensus is forming on the issue, but the issue is likely to be controversial. Without some support from Ige, the Legislature may not want to get into another divisive issue without organized support.

Early on in the session, Ige did come out supporting ways to raise Hawaii's voter-turnout numbers, including all-mail elections. Both the House and Senate have offered their own bills on the issue, so there are strong indications that the Legislature could move on it this year.

Finally, one year ago at this time, the Legislature was rushing to save a deal with the owners of the North Shore's Turtle Bay Resort to spend \$40 million to buy a "conservation easement" protecting the area from development. Not enough time was included to finalize the needed bond sale, so the deal is still in peril.

Lawmakers, however, are predicting that a new deal can be finished in time for adjournment on May 7.

Even if nothing passes, this year will not be a loss, because already, with little fanfare, the Legislature has passed, and Gov. Ige has signed into law, a bill setting the ukulele as the official state instrument. Because this is Hawaii, we actually got two instruments: an "auana" or modern instrument, and a "kahiko" or traditional instrument. The pahu drum is the traditional instrument.

See what the Legislature can do when it buckles down?

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