

## HAWAII

# Les Kondo Confirmed As State Auditor

As state ethics director, he had his run-ins with legislators. But that didn't stop them from approving him for the new job.

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APRIL 22, 2016 • By Nathan Eagle   

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Les Kondo has been a thorn in the Legislature's side pretty much ever since he became the executive director and chief legal counsel for the [Hawaii State Ethics Commission](#) in January 2011.

He's cracked down on lawmakers [accepting Blu-ray movies and iPads](#) from film executives who wanted bigger tax breaks. And his interpretation of the [Ethics Code](#) meant new limits on charitable fundraising at state venues, teachers being compensated for chaperoning students on educational trips, and receipt of gifts, meals and charitable fundraiser tickets.

House Speaker Joe Souki was so incensed with the commission's direction that he [sent a letter](#) last year to the commission's chair, Ed Broglio.



*From left, House Vice Speaker John Mizuno, newly confirmed Auditor Les Kondo, House Speaker Joe Souki, Legislative Reference Bureau Director Charlotte Carter-Yamauchi and Ombudsman Robin Matsunaga share a moment on the House floor Friday.*

“I believe the Commission should examine its own past opinions from the 1970s through 2010 and disavow any directives subsequent to that time that alter past accepted practices,” Souki wrote.

And so the sight of Souki congratulating Kondo as the new state auditor was something to behold Friday after a special joint session of the House and Senate confirmed him to an eight-year term that starts May 1.

There were no floor speeches, no comments to be submitted into the written journal. Just a quick and simple voice vote, a public recognition and on to the next order of business.

After receiving numerous leis and congratulatory handshakes on the House floor, Kondo told Civil Beat that he hopes to continue working to ensure state government is doing what it’s supposed to do for the people.

“I’m excited for the opportunity,” he said. “I’m looking forward to continuing to work in trying to foster public confidence in state government, and I think in the state auditor’s office there’s opportunities to continue doing that just like we were doing at Ethics.”

Kondo said he hopes to help the state become more efficient and effective in using its resources. He replaces Jan Yamane, who has served as acting state auditor for years.

He went through a [tough job evaluation](#) with the five-member, gubernatorially appointed Ethics Commission last summer, but kept his job.

In other business during the joint session, lawmakers appointed Robin Matsunaga to another six-year term as [state ombudsman](#). He has headed the office since 1998.

“The ombudsman is an officer of the Legislature who investigates complaints from the public about actions by state and county executive-branch agencies,” according to a House release.

And lawmakers appointed Charlotte Carter-Yamauchi to a six-year term as director of the [Legislative Reference Bureau](#). She’s been acting director since 2010.

Their terms also begin May 1.

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## About the Author



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**Rick Tubania** · University of Hawaii at Manoa

maybe the legislators want him to start pestering the executive branch instead of them. is this a real promotion or one that says, stay out of my hair and harrass others. oftentimes people are removed or promoted from one job not because of exceptional work but to reduce the impact on the promoting agency.

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**Stan Fichtman** · Honolulu, Hawaii

We will have to see. But the signs are there that this is a lateral move that will put his sharp pencil focus on "other things". The proof of this will be on whom is appointed to the Ethics Committee, and what their salt is worth.

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**Charles Henning**

You mean take the heat off of and deflect accountability away from the legislature?

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**Elise Anderson** · Tutor at Excel Learning Center

Both Kondo and Yamane did their jobs too well for their own good.

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**Ed Wagner**

Mr. Kondo was transferred to shut him up just like Chuck Totto was shut up for doing his job too well by blowing the whistle on city council unethical votes in favor of rail.

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