

Column

Money Talks To Lawmakers During Legislative Session

Numerous legislators continue to hold campaign fundraisers at the same time they're making decisions on their benefactors' issues.

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By Chad Blair    / March 28, 2017

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Last year, just before the start of the Hawaii Legislature's 2016 session, I blogged about which lawmakers were already holding campaign fundraisers.

It included a post on a well-known representative who later pulled me aside in a State Capitol stairwell to complain that he had scheduled his fundraiser just *before* session began that January, and not *during* the session.

His point was that I was being unfair, since no bills had been heard nor funds allocated for projects and programs at the time he was asking for political contributions.

Maybe. But bills and capital improvement projects and other initiatives were certainly already being crafted.

My point was — and is — that it is important for citizens to know that many (though not all) of their state senators and representatives raise money during the 60-day session that runs roughly from mid January to early May.



While a good number of everyday individuals give money to lawmakers, big bucks flow heavily from interest groups.

They include local labor groups, construction and building trades and business organizations, and mainland associations advocating for (and sometimes against) tobacco, alcohol, firearms, gambling, health care, insurance, agriculture and many other issues and industries.

To give you a feel for just how many groups are trying to sway Hawaii politics and policy, here's a few of the [841 organizations](#) currently represented by lobbyists in our state:

- Airbnb
- Grassroot Institute of Hawaii
- Hawaii Family Forum
- Wal-Mart
- Howard Hughes Corp.
- Google Inc.
- Alexander & Baldwin

- Monsanto Co.
- Covanta Energy Corp.
- IBEW Local Union 1260
- Boyd Gaming Corp.

That's just from *the first page* of the lobbyists registered with the Hawaii State Ethics Commission.

Not every lobbyist gives money to candidates, but quite a few do.

Why is this important?

Because it helps citizens understand the myriad alliances at play at the Legislature, and why some bills die mysterious deaths in spite of broad support while others advance in spite of tremendous opposition.

'Hawaii Wins When We Do'

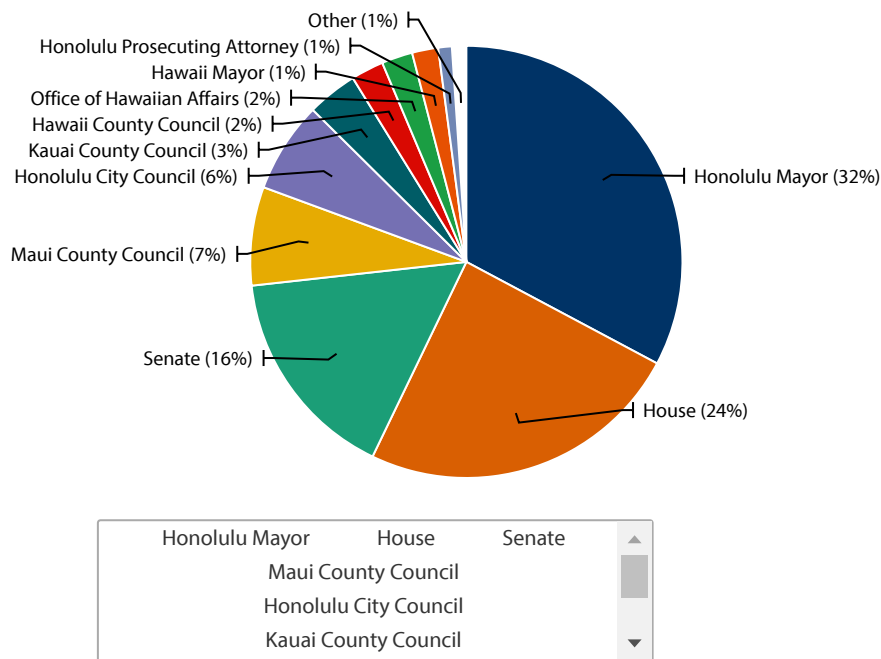
Few incumbents will tell you that campaign contributions actually influence how they ultimately vote, but the reality is that money talks. It also explains why former lawmakers and government officials often become lobbyists.

That's why you'll see former state Rep. Blake Oshiro (deputy chief of staff under Gov. Neil Abercrombie and an attorney at Alston Hunt Floyd & Ing) spending so much time at the Capitol. Same goes for Bruce Coppa, Abercrombie's former chief of staff and a former state comptroller who did previous work with a major PR firm and the pro-rail hui Pacific Resource Partnership.

Total Receipts Distribution For Hawaii's 2016 Elections:

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2016 Elections - Total Receipts by Office



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As part of [Capitol Consultants of Hawaii](#) (self-billed as “Hawaii’s top government affairs and consulting firm ... Hawaii wins when we do”), Coppa and Oshiro’s clients include Airbnb and Monsanto. Perhaps their skilled representation helps explain why bills to allow travel companies to collect state taxes on rental units continue to move forward this session while legislation to require more disclosure on pesticide use has hit a speed bump.

Civil Beat contributor Ian Lind wrote that four of the top 10 contributors to campaigns in the first six months of last year [were associated with Capitol Consultants](#), “the state’s top lobbyist firm, who combined to give nearly \$60,000 to candidates during the six-month period.”

Not that Capitol Consultants always wins. Medical aid-in-dying legislation [was given a lethal dose](#) by the House Health Committee last week, even though Capitol Consultants’ co-founder and president emeritus is John Radcliffe.

That's Where The Money Is

This year I decided to take a different approach in publicizing who raised money during the 2017 session. I wanted to illustrate just how common the practice is, and to point out relationships and preferences.

The chart below shows who raised money, when and where, and with whom through March 21.

Lawmakers like to raise money together. Not coincidentally, those same lawmakers often partner on legislation and are part of political factions.

For example, Majority Leader Scott Saiki, Finance Chairwoman Sylvia Luke and Judiciary Chairman Scott are top House leaders.



Finance Chair Sylvia Luke questions state Tax Director Maria Zielinski during a budget briefing, Jan. 19.

Location is important, too. Mandalay Restaurant and Cafe Julia are just a short stroll from the Capitol.

Note as well that a number of neighbor island lawmakers hold fundraisers in Honolulu.

Some legislators raise money even when it seems they don't need more. Luke, for example, reported having \$165,000 in cash at the end of 2016 — even though she was *unopposed* for re-election.

In fact, Luke spent more than [any other House candidate](#) —\$118,360 — in the 2016 election cycle. By comparison, the average expenditure for winning House candidates typically ranges from about \$30,000 to around \$60,000.

But Luke also contributes money from her campaign to that of others, usually by purchasing fundraising tickets.

Fundraisers Held During Session By The 2016 Legislature:

(Click on a name then use arrow key to move right to see all fundraiser info.)

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Fundraisers Held During Session by the 2016 Legislature

	Candidate Name	Person in Charge	Address 1	Address 2	City
1	Aquino, Henry	Aquino, Henry	P.O. Box 970081		Waipah
2	Baker, Rosalyn	Baker, Rosalyn	P.O. Box 10394		Lahaina
3	Baker, Rosalyn	Arakaki, Gordon	94-1176 Polinahe Place		Waipah
4	Belatti, Della Au	Belatti, Della Au	P.O. Box 900		Honolu
5	Brower, Tom	Brower, Tom	469 Ena Road	#2701	Honolu
6	Choy, Isaac	Choy, Laurie	3313 Keahi Street		Honolu
7	Creagan, Richard	Creagan, Richard	P.O. Box 189		Honolu
8	Cullen, Ty	Cullen, Tristan	94-171 Kehela Place		Waipah
9	DeCoite, Lynn	Davis, Rosie	P.O. Box 1032		Kaunak
10	Dela Cruz, Donovan	Lau, Brett	2064 Halekoa Drive		Honolu
11	English, Kalani	English, Kalani	P.O. Box 267		Hana
12	Evans, Cindy	Evans, Cindy	59-048 Olomana Road		Waimee

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Last year Luke supported Reps. Tom Brower, Cedric Gates, Matt LoPresti, Aaron Ling Johanson, Karl Rhoads, Mark Nakashima, Richard Onishi, Jarrett Keohokalole, Joy San Buenaventura, Lynn DeCoite, Takashi Ohno and Della Au Belatti. All won election last year.

None of this is illegal. And governors, mayors and county council members also raise money even as they are doing the peoples' business.

But unlike those office holders, the Legislature does the bulk of its important work during a period that spans only a few months. It's no coincidence, then,

that that is also when many lawmakers seek campaign cash.

After this article runs, I'll no doubt get complaints from some lawmakers. I also don't expect them to pass a law anytime soon prohibiting fundraising during session.

But maybe they should.

State Legislators Holding Campaign Fundraisers, Jan. 16 – March 21:

Name	Fundraiser Location	Date	Amount
Sen. Kai Kahele	Lola's Grill and Pupu Bar (Hilo)	Jan. 16	\$50
Sen. Jill Tokuda	Pacific Club	Jan. 17	\$250
Sen. Donovan Dela Cruz	725 Kapiolani Blvd.	Jan. 17	\$250
Sen. Gil Keith-Agaran	725 Kapiolani Blvd.	Jan. 17	\$250
Sen. Lorraine Inouye	Mandalay Restaurant	Feb. 7	\$150
Sen. Donovan Dela Cruz	Mandalay Restaurant	Feb. 7	\$150
Sen. Michelle Kidani	Mandalay Restaurant	Feb. 7	\$150
Rep. Daniel Holt	Mandalay Restaurant	Feb. 15	\$100 – \$1,000
Rep. Bob McDermott	Zippy's Ewa Beach	Feb. 18	\$200

Name	Fundraiser Location	Date	Amount
Rep. Richard Onishi	Ground Zero	Mar. 7	\$50 – \$1,000
Sen. Stanley Chang	Square Barrels	Mar. 8	\$50 – \$1,000
Sen. Kai Kahele	725 Kapiolani Blvd.	Mar. 14	\$75
Rep. Christopher Todd	725 Kapiolani Blvd.	Mar. 14	\$75
Rep. Scott Nishimoto	Mandalay Restaurant	Mar. 15	\$100
Rep. Tom Brower	Mandalay Restaurant	Mar. 15	\$50 – \$500
Rep. Aaron Ling Johanson	Mandalay Restaurant	Mar. 15	\$100
Rep. Mark Nakashima	Mandalay Restaurant	Mar. 15	\$100
Rep. Joy San Buenaventura	Cafe Julia	Mar. 16	\$100
Rep. Cindy Evans	Cafe Julia	Mar. 16	\$100
Rep. John Mizuno	Cafe Julia	Mar. 16	\$100
Rep. Dee Morikawa	Cafe Julia	Mar. 16	\$100
Rep. Roy Takumi	Cafe Julia	Mar. 16	\$100
Rep. Della Au Belatti	Cafe Julia	Mar. 16	\$100
Rep. Scott Nishimoto	Ruth's Chris	Mar. 16	\$150

Name	Fundraiser Location	Date	Amount
Rep. Scott Saiki	Ruth's Chris	Mar. 16	\$150
Rep. Mark Nakashima	Ruth's Chris	Mar. 16	\$150
Rep. Sylvia Luke	Ruth's Chris	Mar. 16	\$150
Rep. Aaron Ling Johanson	Ruth's Chris	Mar. 16	\$150
Rep. Takashi Ohno	Mandalay Restaurant	Mar. 21	\$50 – \$1,000
Rep. Richard Creagan	Mandalay Restaurant	Mar. 21	\$50 – \$1,000
Rep. Nicole Lowen	Mandalay Restaurant	Mar. 21	\$50 – \$1,000
Rep. Bert Kobayashi	Mandalay Restaurant	Mar. 21	\$50 – \$1,000

Source: [Hawaii Campaign Spending Commission](#)

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