

CIVIL BEAT EDITORIAL

Show Us Whose Fingerprints Are All Over Legislative Bills

Lawmakers may soon create a task force to reform our grossly inadequate lobbying laws. The work is long overdue.

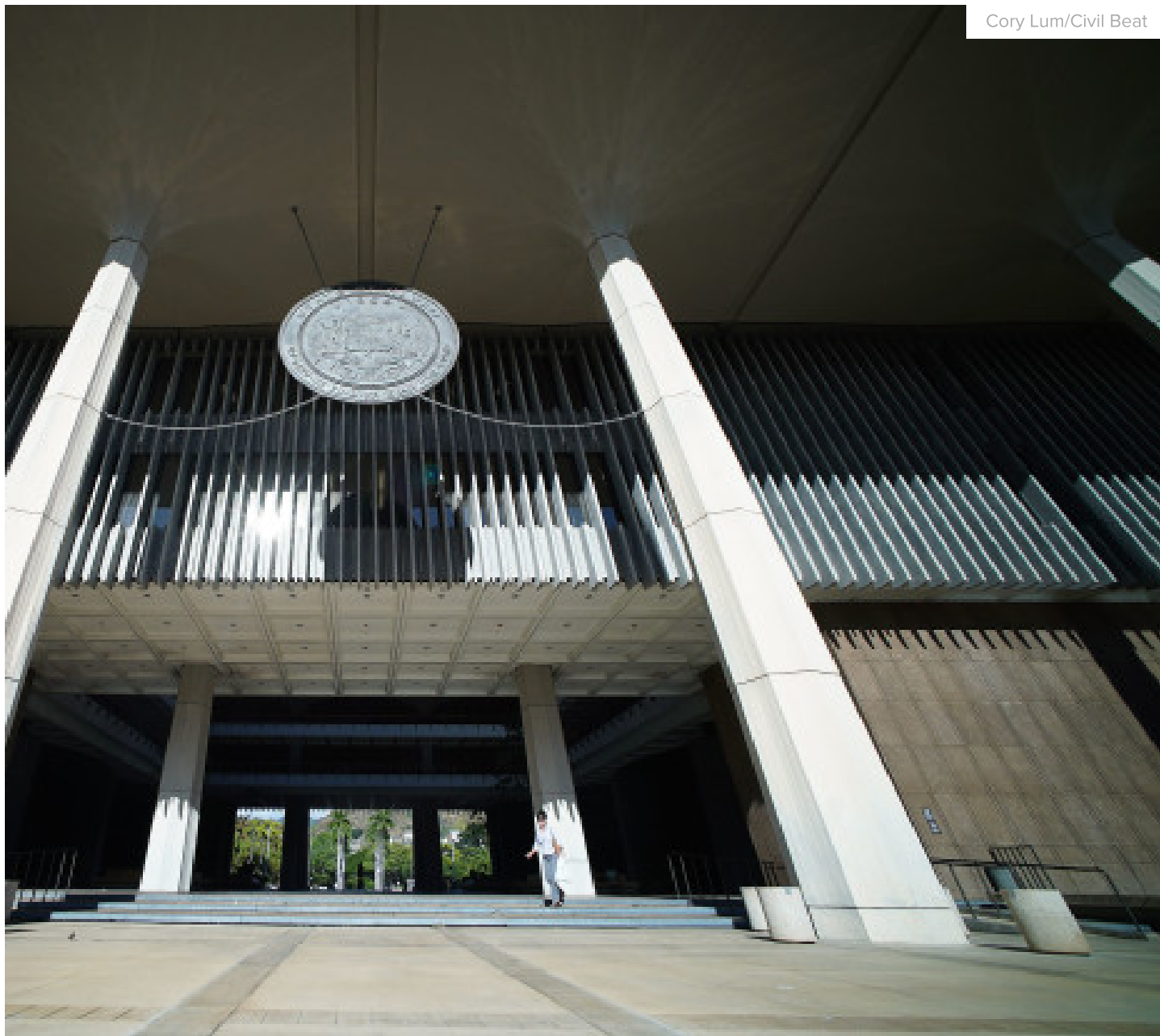
APRIL 13, 2016 · By The Civil Beat Editorial Board 

Share  0

We're never short of people and groups seeking to shape the work of each Hawaii legislative session to their own benefit.

Our state is no different than any other in that regard. But what continues to set Hawaii apart is its lack of solid laws to regulate that lobbying. This leaves our legislative process vulnerable to corruption, particularly in a state government controlled entirely by one political party.

As Civil Beat's [Nathan Eagle reported last week](#), companies and organizations spent nearly \$1 million to lobby the Legislature in the first two months of this year's session. Hawaii law gives the public the right to know how much those concerns are spending on lobbyists and who is doing the work. But that's pretty much where it ends.



clearer accounting of who has access to the Hawaii State Capitol.

Which lawmakers are the lobbyists meeting with? What bills are they targeting? If the organization or its lobbyists don't submit public testimony on a bill, then there's no way to know — they can keep their role in the process secret.

The [Center for Public Integrity](#) recognized that problem with tracking whose fingers are pulling plums out of the legislative pie when it gave Hawaii a D- in 2012 for laws regulating lobbying.

In response, a local group of leading lawmakers, lobbyists, watchdog group leaders and journalists convened to brainstorm solutions. They put forward [a report outlining a number of potential modest reforms](#). It has largely been ignored.

The report included basic ideas such as making legislators' calendars public to allow citizens to know who they're meeting with, and disclosing the authorship of legislation, so that the public can know when a bill is introduced at the request of lobbyists, unpaid advocates or others.

Executive Branch Lobbying

Unfortunately, this lack of disclosure doesn't end with lobbying the Legislature. People lobbying the executive branch of government [don't have to register with the state](#) or disclose their expenditures at all.

While some government observers dispute that this is the case, Civil Beat's Ian Lind illustrated that "blind spot" in Hawaii lobbying law last year in a column about Ciber, an [information technology firm that billed Hawaii more than \\$8 million in fees](#), failed to deliver a new accounting system for the state Department of Transportation and then used a high-powered lobbying firm to avoid consequences.

The State of Hawaii sued the firm last year in an effort to recover some of those funds, alleging "inappropriate political influence." But virtually nothing about the business's lobbying work with Gov. Neil Abercrombie's administration was disclosed to the Hawaii State Ethics Commission; Ciber only disclosed nominal amounts it paid for legislative lobbying work.

Legislation passed the House on Tuesday that would create a formal legislative task force to recommend reforms of our state lobbying laws before the 2017 session. [Senate Bill 3024](#) already has passed the Senate; due to amendments added in the House, it now goes to conference committee for further consideration. The bill's chances of final passage appear to be strong.

Two respected voices in Eagle's report put the issue of lobbying reform in proper perspective, and their words bear repeating. Piilani Kaopuiki of the League of Women Voters said, "Tighter and clear laws provide all players the rules for fair play." Steps in that direction by the task force, she added, could "help to rebuild public confidence in a practice that has been tarnished."

State Ethics Commission Executive Director Les Kondo simply said that the state's outdated lobbying laws are in sore need of a top-to-bottom overhaul.

Legislators should pass SB 3024, and Gov. David Ige should sign it. The task force members, who would be appointed by the Ethics Commission, should waste no time in drawing on the ample source material documenting the shortcomings of Hawaii's lobbying laws.

It's too late to tackle real reform in the current session. But lawmakers can make sure that this is the last year our lobbying regulations fall so far short of providing the transparency we need. And they can start repairing the corrosive cumulative effect this lack of transparency has had on how voters view the work of our state government and our legislators.

Follow Civil Beat on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). You can also sign up for Civil Beat's free [daily newsletter](#).

About the Author



CIVIL BEAT STAFF

The Civil Beat Editorial Board

The members of Civil Beat's editorial board are Pierre Omidyar, Patti Epler, Bob Ortega, Richard Wiens, Chloe Fox and Todd Simmons. Opinions expressed by the editorial board reflect the group's consensus view. Contact Opinion Editor Todd Simmons at todd@civilbeat.com or 808-377-0247.

[Use the RSS feed to subscribe to The Civil Beat Editorial Board's posts today](#)

2 Comments

Sort by **Oldest**



Add a comment...



Mary Alice Ka'iulani Milham

Mahalo nui, Civil Beat. The oligarchy has ruled our islands for 123 years already so these reforms can't come soon enough. Hulo, Pi'ilani Kaopuiki and the League of Women Voters!

Like · Reply · 2 · Apr 13, 2016 11:46am



Toni Auld Yardley · Works at Lanikini Productions, Kanakamaoli Religious Institute

THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS - WITHOUT A TREATY OR BILL OF ANNEXATION - AND THE "FINGERPRINTS" - GO BACK ALL ALONG - TO THE SUGAR OLIGARCHY - AND THEIR SUGAR LABORERS - "KEEPING HAWAI'I UNDER THEIR CONTROL".

IS IT - "TIME TO BOOK `EM DANNO" - OR - "TIME TO STARIGHTEN OUT THE ACCOUNTING BOOKS"? - BUT NO WAY - ACCORDING TO THEIR ACCOUNTING!!

THERE - LIES THE BIG PROBLEM - WHO IS - "ACCOUNTABLE" AND CAN "EARN THE TRUST" - BECAUSE U.S. SENATOR JOHN MORGAN - LED THE CALL - FROM D.C.

READ THE "MORGAN REPORT" AND THE "U.S. CONGRESSIONAL RECORDS ON HAWAI'I IN 1900" - AND THEN WATCH THE MOVIE "THE MEN WHO... [See More](#)

Like · Reply · Apr 13, 2016 4:08pm

Facebook Comments Plugin



Enter your email to receive Civil Beat's free daily newsletter.

SUBMIT