

Scam, from Page 5

for the escrow company, which he did. I also advised him that escrow would send a mobile notary who would ask for a photo ID, such as a license or passport, to confirm his identity. It was after that call that I did not hear back from the seller. After speaking frequently

for weeks, he stopped returning my calls. I called the police and asked them to do a wellness check on my seller. After much research I discovered the true owner had been in the hospital having surgery and was unable to return my calls. I called the FBI and found out they receive over 2,000 calls a day about consumer scams. The

scammer knew a lot about this person and their property. The scammer knew the person would be in the hospital at the time the scam. I will be sure to investigate out-of-town sellers of open land lots more thoroughly. My advice to absentee owners is to be careful with whom you share information about your property during

hospital stays or any extended periods away from home.

Escrow companies are saying there are recent scams regarding wiring of funds. Make sure you seek advice from your real estate professional if you think you could be a victim of such scams. Here's hoping it never happens to you.

Hawai'i State House of Representatives Update

From the Desk of District 8 Representative David Tarnas



Photo courtesy of David Tarnas
Representative David Tarnas speaks for North Kohala as a member of the Hawai'i State House of Representatives.

Aloha Kohala. Last month I provided a list of the House Majority Caucus Bill Package and the priority bills from the House Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs committee which were approved by the House and crossed over to the Senate. This month, I want to describe where we are in the legislative process.

The legislature is completing its work on the State operating budget, Capital Improvement Project budget, and bills that reform policies and programs that are important priorities for Hawai'i's residents. The final phase of the legislative session is a time when conference committees of House and Senate members negotiate the House and Senate versions of each bill that was passed by the respective chambers. For my part, as Chair of the House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian

Affairs, I am taking part in the Conference Committees on over seventy bills. These bills relate to funding for the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, as well as policy reforms regarding elections, ethics, campaign finance, road safety and traffic laws, environmental protection, gun safety, and criminal justice. Specific bills relate to important issues including funding the State's portion of the settlement for claims from the Maui fire that destroyed Lahaina, as well as bills that support efforts to prevent future wildfires, combat the proliferation of illegal fireworks, increase funding for affordable housing, streamline the process for building affordable housing, expand mental health services and substance abuse treatment services, and increase support for those experiencing domestic violence.

The House version of the Capital Improvement Project Budget included \$1 million in funding for the Pololū Valley Lookout improvements, but the Senate did not include it in their budget. The House included \$37 million for the new gymnasium at Kohala High School, but the Senate did not include it in their budget. I am working in the Conference Committee process to keep the funding for these two important Kohala projects in the Capital Improvement Project Budget that will be approved by the legislature on May 2. Updates will be included in my e-newsletter.

Because the legislative session finishes on May 2, this article won't include a list of all the bills that were passed or what is in the State Budget and Capital Improve-

ment Project Budget. To get the latest information, I encourage you to subscribe to my e-newsletter to learn what bills passed and what is included in the State Budget and Capital Improvement Project Budget.

Here are some examples of important House bills that were approved by the House and Senate that are now being debated in Conference Committee:

HB714 HD1 appropriates funds to support educational programs to expand the State's health care workforce, including health care certification programs offered in public high schools; classroom renovations for health care training in public high schools; and education programs to support certified nurse aides in obtaining licensure as licensed practical nurses.

HB250 HD2 requires State Health Planning and Development Agency to gather data and report on the prior authorization of health care services and establishes timelines for the approval of prior authorization requests for urgent and non-urgent health care services submitted by a health care professional, including when a prior authorization request will be deemed automatically approved.

HB1409 HD1 incentivizes development in Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Zones; allocates funding from the Rental Housing Revolving Fund for certain mixed-income rental housing projects or units; and requires the strategic plan developed by the Hawaii TOD Interagency Council to delineate county-designated transit-oriented development areas for each county.

HB692 HD1 expands the Pre-school Open Doors Program's eligibility criteria, allows families with children above the age of two and up to kindergarten entry to apply for program subsidies, and repeals the requirement that Preschool Open Doors Program providers be accredited.

While some bills will secure final approval in the legislature this session, there are many bills that will not get approved this session. We can always consider them again next session and continue work to find a consensus between the House and Senate. Here are two examples of important bills that were passed by the House but did not get approved by the Senate. I hope we can consider these bills again next session.

HB424 HD2 requires the Department of Education (DOE) to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school who meet certain requirements and changes the amount the DOE is authorized to charge for school meals to all students enrolled in department schools.

HB749 HD1 establishes a new Cesspool Conversion Section within the Department of Health's Wastewater Branch, which will manage and facilitate financing options for cesspool conversions, upgrades, and connections; conduct public outreach related to cesspool conversion and compliance; manage grants to assist with conversions; secure federal funding; and facilitate partnerships.

As we wrap up the 2025 legislative session, I want to express my

See Hi Rep on Page 7

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County Council Update

From the Desk of District 9 Councilmember James Hustace



Photo courtesy of James Hustace
Councilmember James Hustace represents North Kohala as part of Hawai'i County Council District 9.

Aloha Kohala!

It was an honor to visit the opening of the Kohala Heritage Center on Prince Kūhiō Day. Mahalo to the volunteers and community leaders for reviving this historic space and for your plans to gather here and share the history of Kohala. Project work from our Kohala High School students was on display to observe the legacy of Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole.

Many of our Kohala Seniors were celebrated at the Retired

Senior Volunteer Program Luncheon in Keauhou on March 28. It was wonderful to attend this important event held to recognize our kūpuna and their continued gifts that support our communities.

Mahalo to Senator Tim Richards for hosting a virtual town hall in April updating the community about the coconut rhinoceros beetle (CRB). With recent discoveries near the Ellison Onizuka Kona International Airport, an increased effort is needed to engage with community members to support detection and mitigate impacts. I was pleased to participate along with our State and County partners on this call in helping to share the message. With this invasive species initially identified in District 9, your kōkua is needed to prevent the spread of CRB. Please visit www.biisc.org for more information and resources.

Kohala residents gathered in full force at Hisaoka Gymnasium for a Community Talk Story with Mayor Alameda. A key focus of the discussion was the upcoming infrastructure projects aimed at improving roads, parks, and community spaces. Mahalo for attending and connecting with

our County leadership about the future of Kohala.

The County Council held four days of departmental hearings marking our initial review of the Mayor's Operating and Capital Budgets. We heard from all County Departments as they shared their progress and detailed their priorities for the year ahead. We will have to address the federal requirements for upgrading our County wastewater systems while also addressing the wide-ranging needs of all of our communities. Increases to the park maintenance budget will help to support ongoing efforts as we care for our treasured park spaces. The Capital Budget includes a request to fund planning efforts to revitalize Mahukona Beach Park. I look forward to supporting this request and working together to realize your dreams for this space. Over the next month, the Council will be holding additional meetings specific to the budget. Mahalo for your testimony and for taking the time to engage in this process.

Please mark your calendars for a Kohala Town Hall with Senator Tim Richards, Representative David Tarnas and me on May 8. Together we will be hosting a North Hawai'i Community Town

Hall Series to connect with you and share our ongoing efforts. Further details to follow.

I am honored to serve as your Council Member. Please reach out if you have any questions. You are welcome to email me at james.hustace@hawaiiicounty.gov, call our Waimea office at (808) 887-6077, or our Hilo office at (808) 961-8564.

Wishing you good health. Be well. Aloha!

HI Rep, from Page 5

appreciation for all of the Kohala residents who contacted me about bills, advocated for funding for the Kohala Gym and the Pololū Valley lookout improvements, as well as other concerns. Your input is very valuable to me and helps me do a better job on behalf of all the residents of North and South Kohala. Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to serve as your State Representative. Please feel free to contact my office by phone at 808-586-8510 or email at reptarnas@capitol.hawaii.gov with any questions or concerns as well as to sign up for my e-newsletter at bit.ly/tarnasnews.

Aloha!

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