



Progressive Democrats of Hawai'i

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February 2, 2009

Relating to HB 539
Testifying in Opposition
On Behalf of
The Progressive Democrats of Hawai'i

Dear Chair Karamatsu, Vice-Chair Ito, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Mahalo for this opportunity to present testimony in strong opposition to House Bill 539 relating to Campaign Spending. My name is Josh Frost and I am the Co-Chair of the Progressive Democrats of Hawai'i (PDH). As the name of our organization suggests, PDH is made up of progressive minded individuals who share, among other things, a strong belief a democracy of, by, and for the people.

This past legislative session, the Hawai'i State Legislature passed a bill to allow for public funding of elections for the County of Hawai'i County Council Elections. The passage of this bill was a great first step toward taking money out of the business of politics. HB 539 is not only contrary to the spirit of that bill, but would likely make the public funding of those elections more expensive by increasing the amount of money corporations can contribute to candidate campaigns.

As US Supreme Court has equated money to speech (a position myself and many members of PDH find extremely troubling), it is logical to conclude that those with more money have more speech, have a louder voice. And as a result of this ruling we cannot ban corporate contributions, but we can certainly limit them, equating them to what individuals can give.

Simply raising the limit individuals can contribute doesn't resolve the issue either. A \$25,000 limit for individuals, equal to what this bill would allow corporations to contribute presumes an unrealistic level of spending for the average individual. I've heard the argument made that this bill simply brings equity to campaign contribution limits imposed on individuals. This is, in my opinion, a flawed argument.

By increasing the limit corporations can contribute, you essentially give those corporate executives the ability to contribute twice, once as individuals and again as finance directors for the corporations' PACs. Not only is this limit out of reach to the average person, but the average person doesn't have the ability to legally contribute twice.

When did it become common understanding that the candidate with the most money wins? I ask you, is this how our representative democracy should operate? Those of us in PDH say, 'no, it isn't.' What's more, what does it say about a representative democracy when those with the most money get more representation? While I am aware that not all elected officials operate in this manner, it is commonly believed by the public that elected officials are bought and sold by big business. Passing this bill would only lend credibility to that belief.

Labor and materials for this donated.



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On behalf of the members of PDH, I am asking you not to undo the progress that has been made by this state to restore voter confidence in the electoral process. Please don't undermine the public funding law passed for the Hawai'i County Council elections.

Restore some faith in our elected officials, elections, and the democratic process by voting against this bill.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Aloha,
Joshua R. Frost
1418 Mokuna Pl.
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Labor and materials for this donated.

karamatsu3-Leanne

From: Paul McKimmy [paul.mckimmy@gmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, February 12, 2009 12:02 PM
To: Rep. Jon Karamatsu; Rep. Ken Ito; JUDtestimony
Subject: Strong opposition to HB 539

Jon Riki Karamatsu
Ken Ito
Committee on Judiciary

Paul McKimmy
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2736 Puuhonua St.
Honolulu, HI 96822

Thursday, February 12, 2009 02:05 PM

Strong opposition to HB 539

I'm writing in strong opposition of HB 539

<<<< Why do we have to fight this ridiculous move every damn time legislature is in session?????!!!>>>>

This bill would raise the current cap of \$1,000 on the amount of money corporations can give directly out of their treasuries to PACs by 250%!

Corporations already have too much influence on the lawmaking process and have an unfair advantage over the general public.

Twenty one states have already banned these types of corporate contributions.

By raising cap and allowing a tsunami of corporate money to flood legislators' campaigns, Hawaii would become the first state in U.S. history to move backwards on this issue -- allowing more money -- instead of moving forwards by banning this money.

Moreover, this bill amends current law to make an exception for corporations, allowing them to donate 25 times as much to a PAC as an individual is allowed to donate. Such an amendment is especially regressive following a national election that emphasized change and the greater inclusion of individual citizen in the political process.

It would be a shame if Hawaii were to become one of the 16 most regressive states in the union by moving against the tide: 21 states have prohibited corporate contributions to PACs, while an additional 13 states have more restrictive limits on corporate contributions to PACs than that proposed in HB 539!

We urge you to defeat this bill, or, better yet, to amend it to prohibit ALL direct corporate contributions to candidates for office, political parties and PACs.