

"Did you ever ride the monorail at Pearlridge? How would you like to ride the monorail from Ewa all the way to downtown?" Oohs and aahs of anticipated excitement rose from the Ewa and Kapolei YMCA Summer Fun students who were on today's field trip. "The new rail system that the City is building will make it possible for you to go to town without a car. It costs \$120 million. That's a lot of zeroes," I said. They oo'd and aah'd again. "Will it be an underground train?" a boy in the back inquired. "No, it'll be an elevated train, above ground. It will be ready in about 11 years," I continued. Their eyes grew big and they shook their heads in disbelief. "If I'm still alive!" "I'll be so old I'll be dead!" came all the groans, sending the undeniably older chaperones into a knee-slapping laughter.



THE COCKROACH IN THE SAMURAI OUTFIT

Eleven years is a lifetime, if you're only 8—13 years old, and the youngest children, the 5-7 year olds only knew that 11 years was *really* long. Talking to school groups on field trips to the State Capitol is one of the nicest things about being a legislator. The students have lively questions. "Why does it take so long?" one boy asked. "Planning, and we have to raise the money." Loud laughs and head shaking from the chaperones. "The state spends a lot of money every year to build and repair things that people need, but we take turns where it gets spent. Maui asks for money, Kauai asks for money, and my job as the senator for Ewa Beach is try to get money spent for what we need in our district. This year the state Legislature gave money for only three new schools to be built, and Ewa is getting a new middle school."

I explained the legislative process, that the House and the Senate engage in dialogue, negotiation and compromise to decide what laws should be made, then send the bills we agree on to the Governor. If she likes it, she signs it, if she doesn't like it, she vetoes it. "What if she doesn't like it but thinks it should be a law anyway?" a girl in the middle asked. "Then she lets it become law without her signature."

"How do you spell 'veto'?" asked a girl in the front row. "V-e-t-o. If it's an Italian name, it's spelled v-i-t-o," I joked. The chaperones laughed, one of them moving a hand back and forth over her head to show the kids didn't catch it.

Many school groups come for their field trip during the busy Legislative Session, when all the Senators' schedules are packed full of hearings, informational briefings and appointments with people who want to tell us about the bills. Pressing demands make those visits short. Since this was during the Interim, we had the luxury of time. It also meant I could take the group onto the Senate floor, which is usually off limits, to see what it's like from our perspective.





The design of the Hawaii State Capitol is magnificent, unique among the fifty capitols in the country for its open style and rich cultural symbolism. I explained the motifs in the design — the blue carpet and white globe of light in the Senate represent the ocean and the moon; the brown carpet and golden globe in the House represent the earth and the sun. The pillars represent the palm trees, the chambers and pool represent the volcanoes and ocean, and the white slopes of the Executive Level represent the clouds going up into the heavens. “I think that looks like a cockroach,” one boy commented, pointing to the blue tapestry that adorns the wall of the Senate chambers. It kind of resembled a cockroach except for the horns at the top. “I think it looks like a cockroach in a samurai outfit,” I responded. A 5-year-old girl followed up: “Why did he paint a picture of a samurai cockroach?”

“How old is the Capitol?” a boy asked. Queenie, the Governor’s Capitol Tours Coordinator, told the students the Capitol was built in 1969. “Look up at the ceiling,” I told them, “what does it remind you of? Sometimes when I’m sitting at my desk on the Senate floor, I look up and I think, that looks like ‘Close Encounters of the Third Kind.’” The

circular, multi-layered sculpted ceiling is dotted all over with recess lighting, resembling the underside of the spaceship in the climactic moments of Steven Spielberg’s film.

Whipping out my two maps of the Ewa plain, the group learned of all of the coming exciting changes in the landscape of the Ewa—Kapolei area. The new North-South Road, I told them to tell their parents that night, will relieve traffic. (Head-tossed-back laughs from the adults.) Kapolei Parkway, when finished, will connect Ewa Beach with Kapolei at Papipi Road, enabling residents to bypass Fort Weaver Road. The new University of Hawaii West Oahu campus will be there in time for them to go to college. “Your parents want you to go to college,” I said, “so you can get a good job.” The new Hoakalei Marina: “Marina—you know the Ala Wai?” Blank stares. “Magic Island—you’ve been to Magic Island?” Yes, they nodded. “Okay, you know the boats down by Magic Island? The new Hoakalei Marina will be even bigger than the Ala Wai.”

“How many of you have eaten at McDonald’s? The original owners — Ray Kroc, he’s dead now, but his wife is still alive. They made so much money from people eating at McDonald’s that they said they’d build six community centers around the country. And every state and every city said, build it in my state, build it in my city. And Ewa was chosen as one of the six lucky cities to have a new community center. You know the Leeward YMCA? It’s going to be about ten times larger than that one. And it will have swimming pools. That’s pools with an ‘s.’” “Will it have a bowling alley?” a chaperone asked. “No, no bowling alley,” I answered.

**AND CLOSE
ENCOUNTERS
OF THE THIRD
KIND**

"You know where the pumpkin patch is? This area is going to have a hotel, a shopping center, a movie theatre and a film studio." Their curiosity was piqued: "Will it be a big hotel like in Waikiki?" "Will the movie theatres have a lot of seats?"

"And do you know what all this development means?" I told them. "Jobs. Lots of jobs for people."

With all the talk of a new train, new schools, new roads and highways, and new marina, a girl in the front asked, "How are we going to pay for all of this?" "Taxes," I answered. "Some people think taxes are bad, but taxes are good because they pay for the things we need like schools and roads." The girl in the red shirt sitting at the end of the last row asked, "How come Hawaii's taxes are so much lower than on the mainland? In California, we pay 7.75%." I explained the difference between sales taxes on the mainland and Hawaii's general excise tax. "Any one who hasn't asked a question yet?" I checked, after having answered maybe one from each of the four dozen or so children in the one hour visit.

They won't be able to ride the new rail until 2018, but they can start riding the Superferry next month between Oahu and Maui, I informed them. The ride will be fun, and there will be lots to do. They can roam the spacious cabin, look at the scenery, play in the kids' place, eat at the restaurants, and shop. "How big is it?" a few asked. About as big as the tapestry wall up to the gallery banister, I guessed. They were impressed and excited. As the students began leaving the Senate gallery for lunch, a sweet little kindergartner dressed in pink, who sat in the back row, lit up because she finally thought of a question to ask: "How big are the seats going to be?"

