



ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

Letting The Voices Of Tomorrow Be Heard

Imiloa Borland, a 17-year-old Punahou student, raised a few eyebrows at the U.S. Conference of Mayors convention when she challenged the nation's mayors to engage young people or risk losing their seats.

Imiloa, who organized last year's local march against gun violence, said young people are frustrated about state and county leaders not listening to them. She repeated the sentiments of David Hogg, a survivor of the Parkland, Florida, school shooting and co-founder of the anti-gun violence March for Our Lives movement.

Both advocated the formation of youth councils to provide input and feedback to government on public policy concerns. It's a worthy idea!

It's already working in our educational system. The Department of Education has state councils that give students a collective voice on the public school system, while the Board of Education has a student representative. The University of Hawai'i's Board of Regents has a student representative. So why not the state and county governments?

We could give young people the right to vote at age 16. Sadly, overall statewide voter turnout here has been declining steadily since a high of 84.4 percent in 1959 to 2018's embarrassing 38.6 percent — one of the lowest since statehood. A galvanized youth group could mount a voter registration drive, just as the March for Our Lives movement has done.

As mayor, my administration created the Po'okela Fellows (which still exists today) to give college students the opportunity to experience work in government. Maybe we could expand that program to high school students.

We could create a youth

change and more.

Maybe all County Councils could create youth advisory boards to solicit input on legislation. The Legislature could use one, for sure, not only throughout the year, but as a means of encouraging young people to pursue elec-

world will be the better for it.

Returning to the scholarships, for over 35 years, I have been presenting the Harvard Book to the top juniors at as many as two dozen schools across the state. The award is to recognize academic excellence and encourage these scholars to pursue their higher education dreams at Harvard.

Last year, I presented the book to Anna Peters of Waiialua High School, and I was delighted to learn that this past spring, she was an early admit to Harvard. Anna also earned a Citizen-Scholar Award from HLTA, a testament to an exceptional young person.

Another award I've been presenting for 25 years is the Scholar-Athlete Award, to one male and one female senior at 'Aiea, Pearl City and Waipahu high schools, the three schools in my former council district.

While all the nominees have been outstanding, one honoree this year deserves a special mention — Justin Pfau of Pearl City. Bound for Linfield College, he will compete in football and track — sports in which he excelled as a Charger — and major in exercise science.

I also presented the Gustav and Faiaso Leadership Awards to some outstanding seniors of Samoan ancestry, something I have done in honor of my parents for 25 years. In 2019, five were awarded statewide and one in particular is worth noting: Mililani's Haley Evile.

Haley, of Samoan and Fil-

ipino ancestry, was the class valedictorian, took nine AP classes, and was president of her class for three straight years. She's bound for MIT, where she aspires to be a neurologist.

Finally, my family offers a full four-year scholarship in my family's name to a deserving scholar of Samo-

an heritage to attend 'Iolani. This year's graduating senior, Mika Makekau, holds the state record of the longest field goal made by a female kicker at 44 yards. The University of La Verne anxiously awaits her historic debut on its football team.

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Mililani scholar Haley Evile is pictured (center, with lei) with parents Pati and Haylein and the author, as well as grandparents Orepa and Rev Iosia Evile, and Demetrio Galicinao. PHOTO COURTESY MUFU HANNEMANN

version of the Neighborhood Board system, possibly a council of representatives from district high schools to identify problems and recommend solutions, be they in bus service, law enforcement, parks and recreational programs, street and sidewalk maintenance, or other county responsibilities.

How about youth representation on the numerous boards and commissions under the county's purview? There are boards for parks and recreation, culture and the arts, planning, climate

tive office and public service.

When we present our annual Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association Citizen-Scholar Awards to public school seniors, I am always impressed with their intelligence, energy and civic engagement, as I am when I present my Harvard Book award and scholarships to students across Hawai'i.

The point is that there is no good reason to deny our young people the opportunity to be engaged, to be heard, to make decisions and to contribute to our future. Our

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