



ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

Bold Decisions Needed For Homeless

News reports and editorials from a few days ago lamented the City and County of Honolulu's loss of federal money earmarked for housing. With the clock ticking on the federal government's largesse, it's a shame that no one at the city had developed a contingency plan, should any of their projects fail to materialize or utilize the requisite funds to meet the draw down amount. And so millions of precious dollars had to be forfeited when the buzzer sounded.

A double blow, considering how the Caldwell administration has embraced the cause of affordable housing, and how they missed a chance to use federal funds to address some of our needs in this regard.

During my stint at Honolulu Hale, a panel selected proposals that were first reviewed by city personnel and were determined to meet the eligibility requirements for this type of federal money. Thereafter, we had staff working diligently to ensure we met deadlines, monitored the execution of programs, and took full advantage of every funding opportunity. And, when deadlines were looming, strategies were in place to guard against any of the monies lapsing. Let's hope the city puts in place adequate safeguards to ensure we don't lose any more money.

Coincidentally, the city's misstep in the housing arena was matched by the state government's pratfall with regard to homelessness. The Hawai'i Community Development Authority, the state agency charged with overseeing the

development and management of the Honolulu waterfront, has thrown up its hands and decided to close Kaka'ako Waterfront Park because of vandalism, unleashed animals and other public safety problems presented by the many homeless camped there.

With the homeless camped at Ala Moana Park and public complaints rising, I decided as mayor to close that park for several days in March 2006 for cleaning and then reopen it with enforced night-time closures. The uproar by some in the community was considerable because no one had done anything like that before. But we held fast and the result was a clean, safe public beach

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park for all our citizens to use. Homeless who needed a place to go were offered the park next to the police headquarters, while churches and other groups offered assistance to the displaced. Still, we were criticized for our swift course of action.

The success of the Ala Moana strategy led us to repeat it with beach parks along the Wai'anae Coast, thereby clearing those public spaces

of the homeless who had lived there for so many years.

It seems with Kaka'ako the state allowed these homeless problems to fester until they reached a major crisis.

For instance, The Children's Museum, which has shared the area for many years, has complained for years about the problems posed by the homeless, particularly the public defecation, vandalism and general security issues on the museum grounds. Their pleas for help were met with very little action.

Now we have the complete closure of Kaka'ako Water-

front Park because the problems have gone unaddressed for so long as to become unmanageable. The park — once a showcase project of several state administrations — will be closed for an indefinite period while the HCDA searches for the money to make repairs and devise a strategy to keep the homeless out.

Businessman / philanthropist Duane Kurisu has developed a shelter program that's innovative and cost-effective. I'm sure there are many other ideas out there. It's high time our government leaders come up with new, perhaps untested ideas to help the homeless, and develop a more comprehensive plan that will ensure that the homeless are not simply moving to other areas.

Additionally, Gov. David Ige has given no indication that he plans to release the \$1 million in Legislature-approved money that will be

matched dollar-for-dollar by private sector and nonprofit groups to address homelessness in tourist-heavy areas. The visitor industry, through Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association, lobbied hard for this measure and has already donated more than \$2 million in private money for organizations serving the homeless across the state. We are prepared to do more to tackle this problem but, like the situation in Kaka'ako, we can't do it alone and would welcome the appropriate and necessary government support.

The taxpayers of the state, plus a lot of our visitors, generated the millions of dollars that were spent to develop the Kaka'ako waterfront. It's time we held our leaders accountable, and that includes having them promptly return our parks to the public for our enjoyment.

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