

HAWAII LEGISLATORS AS APPLIED FUTURISTS

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I very much appreciate the invitation of Representative Hermina Morita to address the House Committee on Energy and Environmental Protection. Rep. Morita asked me to do two things. One is to say something about the role of legislators, especially new legislators concerning futures-oriented issues. The second was to share with the Committee a set of alternative futures for Hawaii that she had heard me speak about before.

So first about legislators.

It is my very strong conviction that legislators need to become futurists--the applied futurists for our society:

As such, they should enable citizens

to identify significant trends and emerging issues;
to understand the long-range consequences of their actions;
so as to anticipate alternative futures;
and to envision preferred futures.

And then to enact legislation.

But to legislate "experimentally" and not definitively, with penalties for those who "disobey."

Politicians should stop pretending they know all the answers, as they do now, and acknowledge they are merely social experimenters, trying out different responses to various problems

and opportunities on the basis of the community's preferred visions which change on the basis of experience, and new problems and new opportunities.

All legislation must seek to balance the needs of present generations with the needs of future generations.

Representative democracy and free market capitalism are best at identifying and satisfying the needs of present generations (or at least of some of them). But both are horrible at identifying and responding to the needs of future generations.

Until recently this was not a problem. Doing the best for present generations was doing the best for future generations.

Unending "Continued Growth" was arguably best for everyone, at least in the long run.

Now we know better.

Continued growth in a finite space--on an island or on spaceship Earth--is the logic of a cancer cell. So we need to pause and ask ourselves:

"Where do we want to go as a community?

What kind of a world do we want to leave to future generations--to the unborn, whose lives we impact by the way we live our lives?

What kind of a world ARE we leaving them?

Will they thank us, or hate us, for what we are doing?

In 1970, the citizens of this State on every island, of every class, culture, and creed, envisioned Hawaii in the Year 2000

It was a magnificent exercise in "Anticipatory Democracy". The best ever, then, and now.

Alvin Toffler coined the concept "Anticipatory Democracy" and praised Hawaii for being the first place to attempt to create it.

"Anticipatory Democracy" is a new kind of futures-oriented governance system. It strives to link citizens, decisionmakers, and futurists together into a new Iron Triangle:

Citizens

Decisionmakers

Futurists

Since 1970, Futures Studies has grown in power and usefulness. The link between Futurists and Decisionmakers is strong. (well, not very strong in Hawaii, but it is in many other parts of the world).

But the link between Citizens and Futurists has, if anything, weakened. (I don't think the link between Citizens and Decisionmakers has gotten much better, either!)

During the Oil Shocks of the 1970s, Hawaii lost its vision and lost its nerve. Once we were known for our innovation and daring as a community. We stopped dreaming and just live for the here and now with little thought for the consequences for our unborn descendants.

We could have taken the economic slowdown of the early 90s as a great chance to rethink our future. But we did not. We just wanted to start growing again, however we could.

We could have used the actual year 2000 to reconsider the past 30 years and to re-envision the next 30 years. But we did not.

It is not too late.

I challenge this Committee and this Legislature to commence a new, widespread and prolonged exercise in Anticipatory Democracy: Hawaii 2030.

I am not saying we should do the same THINGS we did thirty years ago (though many of those things are still relevant). We should use new technologies, new methods of reaching out and involving, and new ways of disseminating results in order to have every citizen on every island participate in ways meaningful to them.

The slogan of the Hawaii 2000 project in Anticipatory Democracy was: "Somebody better care about tomorrow." That is still a great slogan and a great need.

Everyone is thinking about today, though some people are also thinking about tomorrow: but only THEIR tomorrow.

Who is thinking about all citizens now?

And who is thinking about future generations?

Who else can it be but you, who term yourselves "Representatives"? But "Representatives" of what?

Your voters only? Your campaign contributors only? Special Interests?

If so, then who cares for the community as a whole? And who cares for tomorrow--for future generations?

Do you, by focusing only on what is best for your voters/financers? Does this result in the common good for now, and for the futures?

Or do individuals acting individually, without any interference from "government" at all?

Can we be sure that what is good for each of us individually is also good for future generations?

What about business?

As important as business is for the future of us all we cannot hold business responsible for thinking about the futures of the community. Business must care for its owners and stockholders now.

Then how about community groups and nongovernmental organizations? No, as important as their work is, it can only be you, you democratically-elected guardians of the future, as well as or the present.

It is not the case that thinking about the future is something one political party does and another does not. It certainly is not the case that if Democrats are future-oriented Republicans should not be.

Indeed, the most successful futurists have been those affiliated with the Republican Party nationally. The Heritage Foundation, a successor to Herman Kahn's Hudson Institute was the think tank behind Reagan and Reaganomics, and now also behind Dubya.

Newt Gingrich was most certainly a futurist who introduced much future-oriented legislation before he became Speaker of the House. His colleague, who often introduced companion legislation into the Senate was Al Gore.

Both were very active members of the Congressional Clearinghouse on the Future and the World Future Society. Both have written important books about the futures. And while there are significant differences, there are also many similarities in their visions for and fears of the futures.

Acting on behalf of future generations is not something Communists do and Libertarians do not do. They differ in method and substance, but not in concern and intent.

So you may be sure, if you do not "care about tomorrow"--about "Hawaii 2030"--someone else will; someone not responsible to the present nor the futures.

I challenge you to act responsibly, not only towards the present but especially towards future generations

"Somebody (responsible) better care about tomorrow."

Why not you?

Normally preferred futures, but Mina heard four alternatives, so☺

Hawaii Future One

Hawaii continues to muddle through with no guiding vision, not really failing, but not excelling in anything either.

Tourism hangs in there, but rather like Coney Island or Atlantic City--a tattered reminder of earlier, grander times. Waikiki is shabbier and shabbier, attracting only tourists who come from parts of the world more wretched than it is. While some of the neighbor islands continue to develop very upscale facilities for the rich and famous, all tourist facilities are owned and managed by off-island interests, so most of the untaxed profits flow out as quickly as the money flows in.

Most airlines have ended their service. Hawaii is no longer profitable because of the exorbitant cost of fuel and that fact that most people were flying on free frequent-flyer tickets. Persons who once would have paid for first or business class tickets now travel in their own private or corporate jets. The price of tickets on the only two remaining airlines (State-subsidized Hawaiian and Aloha) now reflect the true cost. Few locals can afford to fly anywhere, even to the other islands, at these prices!

Once-proud forms of governance, adopted immediately after Statehood (when centralized governmental structures were considered to be progressive and good) remain, with a large but disillusioned civil service. Democrats continue to rule, but with no discernible policy. It makes more sense to consider Hawaii to be a "no-party state" instead of a Democratic Party state. Issues which do make it into the State's formal political process tend either to be matters of personal morality (such as the old same-sex marriage issue) or else various pork barrel measures which grease local palms and activities and win votes for individual legislators, but do not serve any broader community purpose.

Taxes are low and regressive so that the number of working poor steadily increases, along with the number of very rich who spend

their wealth on items imported from the mainland or elsewhere overseas (whence also most profits flow), and on investment in overseas stocks, land, and developments--rather than on anything which would enable the wealth to spread and grow in Hawaii. Nonetheless, governmental officials continue to give handouts and tax breaks to "lure" mainland/overseas companies and operations here, rather than using tax money to invest in people already living in Hawaii--especially in creating the best educational system possible.

With so much local money going to outside interests (that are quite willing to come to Hawaii for a while and take as much from Hawaii as they can, and then leave), both the DOE schools and the University of Hawaii system are utterly mediocre educational institutions in one small, isolated community lost in the oceans of the world.

Hawaii Future Two

Like many other small rural (especially, Pacific Island) communities, Hawaii is for most locals just a place in which to grow up or to die. The population of Hawaii is composed overwhelmingly of the very young and the retired. Local young adults and middle aged people go elsewhere in the world to seek their fortune, hoping that, when they make it, they can afford to "return home" to retire. In the meantime, if they can, they send their children to grow up here, cared for by relatives or grandparents, but knowing for certain that their own children, too, will move away when they come of age.

Remittances from these "overseas locals" are a significant source of income for locals remaining in Hawaii.

Asia enjoys a roaring high-growth economy; the economic prosperity of a united Europe continues and expands; and the Long Boom in the United States all mean that many rich people come to Hawaii to live a life of leisure in the sun. Most of these people have no interest in local cultures or needs whatsoever. The elderly rich come to retire and die in peace while the younger idle rich simply use Hawaii as one of their many jet-setting residences.

The situation in Hawaii thus is in some ways like the Japanese boom years of the 1980s, except that the newcomers now are much richer and more culturally-varied, while taxes are so low that the local community does not receive much if any benefit from the presence of the super-rich.

Most of the newcomers are primarily from the Chinas, Korea, Malaysia, and India, as well as Japan, though many also are from Europe and North America.

Government caters to the needs of the (mostly elderly) rich, both by luring them to come to Hawaii to live, and seeing that their taxes remain low.

Schools in Hawaii are even more two-tier than they were in the 1990s. Public schools warehouse people until they are old enough to move off-island for whatever jobs they can find. Private schools educate those who can afford it--as can all newcomers (the few who have children) and some locals--to the best world-class standards. UH returns to its status before the 1960s--as a refuge for those who cannot afford, or cannot be admitted, to mainland universities.

Hawaii Future Three

Hawaii makes a virtue out of its being out of step with the world. We have rejected as many of the trappings of modernity and post-modernity as possible. We have restored Hawaii everywhere to what it was before mass tourism destroyed it--for some that means to Hawaii of the 1940s, 50s and early 60s; for others it means the 19th Century; and for others, it means even earlier.

No new mass tourist facilities have been built in the 21st Century, and most of the largest and/or most "unHawaiian" of the older ones were torn down with the same glee monuments to Marx, Lenin, and Stalin were toppled when communism collapsed. The remaining tourist facilities have been restored to what they were like when they were new.

We have gotten rid of all fast-food franchises, big box stores, "made in (anywhere but Hawaii)" tourist trinkets, and the like, and (much to the delight of tourists who come to see something different, and not what can be found in every other tourist trap in the world) we have restored plate lunch wagons and stalls, mom and pop grocery and sundry stores, and other locally-based and -run operations all selling products grown or made by local craftspersons using local materials only. Small diversified agriculture, fishing, and fish-farming have returned as major occupations, providing almost all of the food for locals and tourists alike.

The fundamental land-use, economic, and governing basis in Hawaii is the traditional ahupua'a. Government thus is entirely decentralized, economies largely self-sufficient and small scale, while cultures and lifestyles differ from community to community. Issues of "sovereignty" have not been officially resolved. We remain, formally, a state within the US. But Hawaii is so out of step with the mainland, and so economically (and militarily) unimportant to the US, that Hawaii is left free to go its own way with minimal interference from the outside.

Public education at all levels is focused on preserving and enhancing diverse local lifestyles. Schools are run mostly out-of-doors in a relaxed, tutorial, hands-on way. Practical attitudes and skills are demonstrated and taught. Reading and writing are de-emphasized (but not totally neglected) while talking things over thoroughly, caring for and about others, anticipating and mediating disputes before they escalate, and cooperating in group tasks rather than striving to excel in individual endeavors are the real "basics".

All of this has made Hawaii vastly more attractive as a "tourist destination". But at the same time, tourism is now very strictly limited, and restricted only to those who are willing to pay the most to be the least intrusive by their presence. Thus a unique kind of local "ecotourism" has evolved which is based neither on false notions of a "Polynesian Paradise" on the one hand, nor on hedonistic "sex, sun, and surf" activities on the other, but rather on appreciation of the one spot in the world where time is blissfully standing still, happily frozen at various blessed times in history.

Hawaii Future Four

Hawaii is an independent nation whose citizens are not only locally based but also globally dispersed. They are, in short, not only citizens but also netizens. The process of the devolution of large nation-states into smaller geographically and electronically networked communities is in full force everywhere, including the former "United States". While Hawaii is "sovereign" (if one can continue to use that obsolete word from the old industrial era), it is also aligned with other "sovereign" communities into a larger cultural community called "Oceania."

Hawaii is fully integrated into the global economy. "Place" no longer is related to "work", and "work" has virtually vanished in a cybernetic world run by varieties of artificial intelligence. "Leisure time" is now abundant for everyone, while most goods and services are freely available to whomever wishes them.

Learning, similarly, is everywhere and nowhere. There is a physical presence, which takes the form of scores of what might in the old days have been called "neighborhood schools" or "community colleges" spread throughout the Hawaiian Islands. Most provide a kind of meeting place for ad hoc learning projects or face-to-face tutoring. Others provide facilities for ad hoc research groups, formed on what would in the past have been considered a "multi-disciplinary" basis, although most old academic disciplines have long since vanished. Some of these research groups are brought together to address issues of basic, theoretical concern. Others--the vast majority--are of an applied and practical nature. There are also a large number of intellectual ronin/monks and nuns--scholars of the truly old school who, living with relatively no concern for worldly goods or profit, still teach and do research on matters of interest only to themselves. Their "crazy ideas" often provide breakthroughs and insights for others later.

However, the heart and soul of all learning is what was misleadingly once called "distance education". Learners have access to material in highly sophisticated, personalized, interactive,

"virtual reality" modes. While some of the form and content is created by curriculum-providers located in Hawaii, most of it is developed, in vast and spectacular profusion, usually by the very best (but sometime by the very worst) scholar-producers in the world. Each learner may start whatever course of study she wants, wherever she wishes to enter it, and can proceed as far and as fast as she wishes in any specific direction, branching out into other related areas through what were called "hot links" once upon a time. Each person thus has individualized and utterly unique (and endlessly ongoing and evolving) knowledge and skills. The distinction between elementary, secondary, and higher education has vanished.

Probably the most exciting new development was the creation of a "branch" of the University of Hawaii on Mars. Because of this, an additional verse has been added to the Alma Mater, which proclaims:

In Valles Marineris our Alma Mater waits
For Martian songs and laughter to ring its opened gates.
So come and join your children! The journey's now begun
For wider truth and service, in worlds beyond our Sun.