

# Possible Superferry silver lining if we heed the call

## THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



The silent majority of businesses and residents received a wake-up call after Judge Joseph Cardoza rendered his decision

that the Hawaii Superferry is not to be allowed to operate on Maui while an environmental assessment is being conducted.

Long recognizing that this is a much bigger issue than one company's operation, the Maui Chamber of Commerce communicated the Superferry's importance to the economy and businesses, to trans-

portation and safety options, and to residents. We advocated for the project on behalf of our diverse membership representing more than 940 businesses, and expressed their views.

Yet, as is becoming more commonplace with legislators out of touch with the business community, several legislators asked, "Where is your membership? Why aren't they here testifying in person?" The obvious answer, that our members are busy running their businesses, must have eluded them.

Sadly, legislators being out of touch with the business community is a growing trend. While it's a trend that the Maui Chamber of Commerce keeps fighting, the silent majority's voice is being

overshadowed by smaller but more active and vocal groups. We're working to correct that.

Also, businesses and residents expect that reason and logic will prevail as a matter of course and are finding that they aren't. Businesses and residents recognize that more action is needed, want the facts presented and discussed, and are looking for ways to participate.

With respect to the Hawaii Superferry, business people used e-mail after the decision was rendered to leverage their time and be heard — flooding legislators with e-mails requesting a special legislative session to allow the Hawaii Superferry to operate while the environmental assessment is under way.

So, when two Maui legislators made negative comments in response to the flood of e-mails, we were disappointed. According to The Maui News, Sen. Kalani English commented that "the e-mail campaign is more annoying than persuasive."

More annoying than persuasive? How can that be? The peo-

ple became engaged; that's what the system is for. The flood of response should serve as a wake-up call to our legislators.

Sen. English went on to comment that, "They're assuming we are too naive to know it's auto-generated even when it all says exactly the same thing and is coming in by the minute. It's fake public support." Sen. Roz Baker also apparently commented that, "We haven't had a lot of phone calls, so there isn't a lot of opportunity for dialogue. I am interested in hearing from people who have thought through the issues and may have some real feelings rather than somebody who is just forwarding on some e-mail."

Business people are running businesses, keeping up with changing markets, and dealing with increased costs. So, when they use e-mail — one of the fastest ways for them to express their opinions — to address government actions, our elected officials should take note of their point of view.

Officials should realize what it

takes to run a business, appreciate the sending of a message, and honor the opinions of the business sector rather than imply that the e-mail expressions are fake or not well thought out. Businesses participate in a process efficiently by forwarding e-mail.

The e-mails we saw were not auto-generated but passed on by supporters or found on the Hawaii Superferry Web site. One had to cut and paste a message into the body of an e-mail and send it. The supporters and the Web site provided a quick template to help businesses and residents expeditiously express their opinion. Why is that a problem now when this has been an acceptable practice in the past? We need an answer to that question as e-mail is an important tool for businesses, particularly Neighbor Island businesses, to communicate with legislators.

However, what's most important is a working process with mechanisms for the voice of business to be heard, because the Superferry is only one of many issues we're addressing.

An Upcountry business owner, who has watched the transient vacation rental (TVR) situation unfold and feels businesses aren't being listened to, shared her concerns with me recently. She asked if I felt the voices of Upcountry businesses owners would be paid attention to if they mobilized, wrote letters of support for TVRs, and explained how shutting down TVRs will impact their businesses. I said I believed they would (people have to be heard!) and that it's important to communicate (speak, phone, write or e-mail) the message.

So, if there's any silver lining to the Superferry fiasco, it might be that the silent majority heeds the wake-up call, gets involved (through advocacy groups like the Maui Chamber of Commerce or individually), speaks out and joins us in communicating the voice of business. We welcome more participation.

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