

Business owners urged to get involved; Legislature to open Jan. 17

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



Chamber of Commerce has been

Jan. 17 marks the official commencement of a new legislative session and thus begins the 2007 legislative process that the Maui

gearing up for since July.

We began with our Policy Convention to update and create new position statements on a range of issues affecting business and the community. Position statement topics include: economic development, county and state government affairs and regulatory matters, education, environmental affairs, health, public safety, harbors, highways, and more. These position statements, created by the Cham-

ber's membership through the Policy Convention, form the foundation for our legislative and advocacy work — one of the most important benefits of Chamber membership according to member surveys.

Next, we embarked on a voter registration drive — recognizing that private business employees could be the largest voting bloc if mobilized. We urged businesses on Maui to encourage their employees to get out and vote. A vot-

er registration mailing went out to over 6,000 businesses on Maui in August. Information on conducting voter registration drives was included in the chamber's weekly eNews.

This being an election year, we then embarked on our Candidate Endorsement process to help elect pro-business candidates. All county and state candidates were invited to participate in the chamber's endorsement process and were

sent the questions for their race. Thirty-two candidate interviews were held, with candidate scoring based on their written and verbal responses to questions asked. Candidates with the highest score — meaning their responses were most congruent with the chamber's values and positions — became the chamber endorsed candidate. Thirteen candidates were endorsed for county and state races, with seven of those candidates winning their

elections.

Most recently, leaders from each of the Neighbor Island chambers of commerce have gotten together to begin planning a cooperative legislative agenda. The combined group, from Maui, Oahu, Kona-Kohala, Hilo and Kauai, represents over 2,700 businesses and nearly 250,000 employees. While the

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full legislative agenda is still being worked on, workers' compensation, tort and unemployment insurance reform, as well as infrastructure, education and environmental issues will be on the collective agenda.

As in the past, the Maui Chamber of Commerce will be asking businesses to get involved in the legislative process to effect positive change. While we recognize that it is time consuming and takes

business owners away from their business, it is important for the Legislature to see the faces of the businesses and to hear from them directly on how the legislation will impact business.

We also recognize that the process is confusing and that keeps many businesses and individuals away. Through our weekly eNews to our membership, we will help educate members on the process and keep them abreast of the legislation we are tracking.

It's important to know that the

legislative process is based on a timetable, jointly approved by the speaker of the House and the Senate president, that sets forth a series of hurdles or deadlines that all measures must meet and coordinates the movement of bills and resolutions. Thankfully, rules of this game are firm — a measure is "dead" if it fails to meet the deadlines established by the timetable.

Some bills move through the legislative process quickly and require immediate attention. We will work to keep our membership

abreast of those measures.

Understanding the legislative process is important. Resources are available online to walk you through the process.

The Citizen Guide to Participation in the Legislative Process (Fourth Edition, January 2006) is available at www.capitol.hawaii.gov/site1/info/guide/guide.asp?press1=info&press2=guide. It includes an overview of the legislative process, testimony guidelines, committee information, contact information for the legislators, and

resource center information.

The legislative timetable can be found at: www.capitol.hawaii.gov/site1/info/time/time.asp?press1=info&press2=time. It currently shows the 2006 timetable, however, it will be updated in the coming month.

Knowledge, effective and timely communication, and partnerships are key to successful participation in this process. We are working cooperatively with other chambers of commerce in the state and various community organiza-

tions to maximize our effectiveness this legislative session. A broad-based business sector voice is essential. We invite our members and the entire business sector to join us making Maui and the state a better place to do business, ensuring fair legislation and a private business climate, giving the private sector a stronger voice in government, and positively impacting our community. Working together, we will make a difference!

■ Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.