DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII Legislation Committee Report

1. Legislative Priorities

1. Increasing the Minimum Wage
2. Early Childhood Education
3. Support of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Education
4. Legislation Increasing Neighbor Island Participation in the Legislative Process
5. **Invasive Species Protection**
6. **Climate Change\***

On December 27, I met with House Majority Leader Scott Saiki and House Finance Committee Chair Sylvia Luke. We discussed the Party’s priorities, as well as what House Democrats were planning to prioritize this session. Climate change and invasive species are both priorities for them and so, after discussing with the Legislation Committee, it was agreed that these should be added to our list as well.

\*Climate change is a broad topic that can touch upon a number of resolutions, so the Committee will track all legislation along these lines and determine which ones we will work on.

On Monday, December 30th, some members of the Legislation Committee met and discussed expanding the initial proposed list of legislative priorities. In the course of that discussion, in addition to those added above, it also became obvious there are two issues related to GMOs which some members wish to add to the priority list. Because we could not achieve consensus, we hope to get feedback from the rest of the State Central Committee on these.

1. GMO LABELING: The Party adopted a resolution at the 2012 State Convention calling for the passage of GMO labeling legislation. This issue had some support from the community in the last session, but the bill was held. Since that time, the movement for labeling and critical of GMOs has grown considerably and there will definitely be a renewed effort by some community members to press for passage of a bill in the upcoming session.  On the other hand, I have been advised by legislative leaders that it is extremely unlikely any such bill will advance in the upcoming session.  Given the circumstances, should GMO labeling be added to the Legislative Committee’s priority list or not?
2. Concerns over GMOs and their pesticide use has generated great public attention and activism, particularly on Kauai, the Big Island, and is growing on Maui as well. Kauai passed a pesticide disclosure and regulatory bill after lengthy and contentious hearings. The GMO industry spokesmen have claimed state law “pre- empts” the authority of counties over the health and safety concerns surrounding

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pesticides. On the Big Island, the county council passed a different bill, blocking the cultivation of almost all GMO agricultural products, except for papaya. Again, the industry asserts state and federal law should pre-empt the county authority.

One legislator has already announced their intention to introduce a bill which would pre-empt county authority over the health and safety concerns related to agriculture. This approach will erode county home rule and is viewed with displeasure by the neighbor island county councils. We do not see a specific resolution or platform plank that speaks to this issue. We have, historically defended home rule at the county level and our skepticism of GMOs has been incorporated in resolutions in recent years, but there is nothing that speaks specifically to this matter.

Given that this is likely to be one of the two major points of contention in the struggle over GMOs, should the Legislation Committee add to our list opposition to any attempt to pre-empt the counties’ authority in these matters?

Leimomi’s note: The legislative priorities listed above including GMO

Labelling and support for home rule were adopted by the DPH State Central Committee.