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Representative Jessica Wooley

MAY 27, 2009 |



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1. What was your biggest accomplishment this session?

“My biggest accomplishment was passing two bills I introduced on behalf of my community. HB 1552 will ensure that after 30 years, there is finally a master plan for Hawai‘i’s only living park, Kahana Valley, and will also prevent the eviction of families that make the park “living.” HB 1713 will protect families in my district and throughout the state from hazardous conditions, such as overhanging trees, by encouraging landowners to remove threats to their neighbors. If they won’t, the bill authorizes the state to enter private property to protect public safety.

To get these bills passed, I held numerous meetings with my constituents, who responded enthusiastically and showed up to testify at hearing after hearing. The outpouring of community support was key to these successes.”

Capitol Yearbook 2009

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2. With which piece of 2009 legislation are you most proud to be affiliated and why?

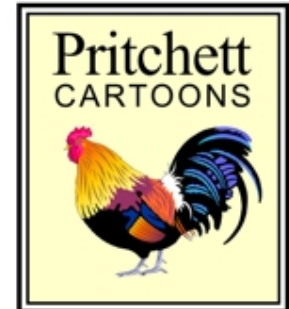
"I'm very proud of HB 1713, which illustrates how the democratic process is supposed to work. Just before the legislative session started, I attended a Kahalu'u Neighborhood Board meeting and heard from residents who live in fear because their neighbor, billionaire Genshiro Kawamoto, would not respond to their pleas to trim giant trees on his property that hang perilously over their homes. I immediately drafted and introduced a bill to address the problem. The bill authorizes the state to enter private property to protect public safety (after giving notice and an opportunity to mitigate) if the landowner fails to respond.

The first version of the bill was far from perfect, but it got the process started. I then met with concerned residents in my district, key staffers at state Civil Defense (the agency that would be involved if the bill became law), and committee chairs scheduled to hear the bill to brainstorm about ways to make sure the bill would get the job done. I also spoke with fellow legislators so they could understand why the bill was so important to my constituents, as well as how the bill might address similar threats to public safety in their districts.

All along the way, I kept in touch with the folks in my district most concerned about this issue, and they turned out at every hearing to encourage legislators to pass the bill for the safety of their families. Less than five months after the Kahalu'u Neighborhood Board meeting, HB 1713 was on the governor's desk, proving that when the system works as it's intended, government can respond quickly to

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Gene Ward
Senator Norman
Sakamoto

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community needs.”

3. What was the biggest disappointment of the session and how might a similar disappointment be prevented in the future?

“My biggest disappointment was I rarely was able to see my children during session. Unfortunately, that goes with the territory, particularly for House members on the Finance Committee. There’s simply a lot of work that has to be done in a short amount of time.”

4. Debating which issue turned out to be the biggest distraction from your priorities?

“None.”

5. What’s one thing you wish voters better understood about you or the political process as a whole?

“Before taking office, I, like most voters, was pretty skeptical of politicians and their motivations. As a freshman legislator, however, I’ve been pleasantly surprised by my colleagues’ dedication to serving the public interest. While I may not always agree with them on every issue, they each are legitimately trying to do what they think is best. That’s not to say there isn’t room for improvement and that foolish decisions aren’t sometimes made. But voters should know that, with rare exception, their legislators are trying to do the right thing.”

« Senator J. Kalani English | Representative Gene Ward »

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