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Column: Climate bill is a model of collaboration

By Chris Benjamin and Scott Seu - Today - Updated 12:30 am



Hawaii faces significant challenges that will be resolved only through the collective efforts of diverse groups. Climate change is one of the critical issues on which we must come together to develop and implement solutions. While the stakes are high, so too are the opportunities. Hawaii has all the ingredients to be a world leader in addressing climate change, including the urgency to protect itself and a strong pool of businesses and nonprofit organizations supporting innovation and climate-related economic development.

We also have leaders at the state and county levels driving action to advance Hawaii's climate response. We applaud these efforts and encourage their implementation. In particular, we believe in a collaborative approach to drafting legislation that brings disparate groups together to focus on building scientifically valid policy that is both practical and implementable. If these groups can set aside short-term agendas and focus on the long-term benefits for our state and the planet, we will make real progress.

A prime example is Honolulu City Council's Bill 22, which recognizes that buildings are responsible for approximately one-third of all carbon pollution on the island of Oahu and are, therefore, an essential focus of climate mitigation efforts. Bill 22 seeks to create Honolulu's first building benchmarking program, requiring owners of buildings 25,000 square feet or larger to track and disclose energy and water use. This bill is a cornerstone of the Honolulu Climate Action Plan and the Oahu Resilience Strategy. But it also is the type of bill that might traditionally have met stiff opposition during the legislative process.

Recognizing they have kuleana in this space, many local businesses and industry groups have worked proactively with Mayor Rick Blangiardi's Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency (CCSR), the Honolulu City Council, and environmental groups to be part of the climate solution. Rather than seeking to defeat Bill 22, business and industry offered insights to make a benchmarking policy effective and efficient for those who will be tasked to implement it. This collaboration has resulted in a bill that achieves our shared environmental and climate objectives while taking into account the perspectives of property owners. The bill deserves broad support — including from business owners, utilities and environmental groups.

The support of Bill 22 from many local businesses may surprise some, since it creates a mandate to spend time and resources tracking energy and water use, and being publicly transparent about their progress. However, the leaders of these businesses are local residents who feel the rising temperatures, take their kids to slowly disappearing beaches, and worry about what path the next hurricane will take. We believe business leaders must actively and constructively engage in creating

effective policies that meaningfully address our climate crisis, and are pleased by the initiative so many have taken in support of Bill 22.

While adopting this new program may be challenging in the short term, the data generated by Bill 22 will help large building owners and their tenants find ways to conserve island resources, cut emissions and reduce expenses over time. Many responsible building owners are already tracking usage as mandated by Bill 22 and actively investing to optimize resource efficiency.

Hawaii, and the world, won't reach our climate goals unless we work together as a community. We must transition our buildings — along with our transportation system, electrical grid and economy — rapidly away from fossil fuels toward clean energy. Bill 22, and the collaborative process that shaped it, is an important step on that path and deserves the support of our community and City Council.

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