



The temporary sewage pipe by Ala Moana Beach Park reminds us of past mistakes. It is near residences, hotels, shopping and recreation.



The JABSOM back-up generator is in the building closest to the ocean. The fencing on the right is a drainage canal to the ocean, 300 yds away.

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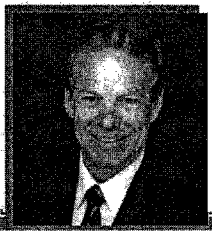


Senator Gordon Trimble, Sonia Trimble and their guests seated on the Senate floor, January 17, 2007, Opening Day of the 24<sup>th</sup> State Legislative Session.

**SENATOR GORDON TRIMBLE**  
**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

February 2007

WAIKIKI  
 NEIGHBORHOOD BOARD NO. 9



**When Dumb Becomes Dangerous**

Ignoring risks instead of preparing for disaster merges the lines between dumb and dangerous. Our state is, unfortunately, no stranger to either dumb or dangerous.

For one, dumb is selling public land in Kaka'ako to develop expensive, high-end housing to be sold to non-locals while there is a housing shortage among the people currently living in Hawaii.

On the other hand, dangerous is deferring maintenance on our sewer system to plant trees and build soccer fields. We learned that while death is never welcome, death by flesh eating bacteria is a dramatic illustration of what happens when risks are dismissed as *de minimis*. Dangerous is also when UH Medical School officials suggest that the importation of the avian flu virus is essential to your health. Is it really wise for state government to approve the virus for handling in a facility that is actually their third choice?

At the Board of Agriculture hearing on January 24<sup>th</sup>, University officials asserted that they needed to have this deadly virus on hand to verify if field samples were similarly infected. They further asserted that alternative identification would take days to weeks if it were done at their laboratory.

The U.S. Armed Forces have similar concerns. But when they reached the proverbial fork in the road, they took the other one. They did not seek to import the virus to where it was not. Their objective was not laboratory identification but rather rapid field verification. As such, timely isolation, not vaccination, is their most pressing concern. Moreover, they are currently conducting trials on products that allow for positive verification in the field in less than ten minutes. Most importantly, they are testing their products where the virus already is not seeking to bring it to where it is not. How can we think that we are any smarter than they are?

Our Department of Health claims that we need to be able to identify infected arriving passengers. Consider such noble intentions with the fact that 20,000 visitors arrive in our state each day. Sending samples to the UH medical school and waiting hours for verification does not appear to be a properly engineered solution. Given the closely confined spaces in which travelers have been ensconced for a long flight, diseases have the potential to spread rapidly from one passenger to

another. Quite frankly it is more efficient to require passengers to be screened at the airport of origin than to wait for a whole plane load to be noticeably affected by the time of debarking.

Is it logical to use different rules for travelers and other arrivals? The U.S. government is using this methodology with cargo. For years, U.S. Customs personnel have screened cargo before it is loaded onto container ships instead of passively reacting when the cargo is unloaded at a busy domestic port. Our state also screens for alien agricultural pests at Honolulu International Airport before departure for California—not after the pest has landed in California.

Risk is determined by the weakest link—not the strongest. To avoid interference with lectures, the UH Medical School placed their emergency generator as far from the school buildings as possible. As a result, the generator is located on the ground floor of the building closest to the ocean, facing the ocean. When it comes to effective disaster management, we have ignored the real lessons of Pearl Harbor, Hurricane Katrina and 9/11. Catastrophes occur when the real dangers are marginalized instead of mitigated.

The underlying rationale for a specific tsunami risk assessment is that when you build a school or a bio-containment lab it is presumed that it will remain there for perpetuity. This is very different

from the rational decision making process of individuals or private companies. The private sector limits their own exposure to risk by reducing the duration of their own individual exposure. Moreover, resale markets exist because there are always individuals who are willing to assume risk based upon their own perceptions. Ultimately, businesses that exercise poor judgment fail; governments, rather, raise taxes.

Perception may be more important than actual risk. There is no level of risk that is worth casting doubt on the most valuable branding of paradise that has ever been created. From lessons past, we have not learned to avoid that intersection of dumb and dangerous. At this point, we cannot afford to cross the line by taking the wrong fork.

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