

Select leaders wisely; there's a lot at stake

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



This week's news about a number of past elected officials gearing up to run in the coming

election has heightened conversation on where we are currently, our desired sustainable future based on the Triple Bottom Line (economy, environment and social well-being), and the leadership required to get us there.

The news has many question-

ing whether they want to re-engage leaders of the past or put new leadership forward. As we think about those who served before, it takes us back to what these candidates did and did not do to move us forward, and how they compare with those in office now and the other candidates running.

The news comes at an interesting time as we at the Maui Chamber of Commerce are reviewing the performances, stances and voting records of our current county and state elected officials to examine how "business friendly" they have been over the past two years.

Reviewing officials is not an

easy task. Most elected officials have taken actions we agree with and actions we do not agree with — including actions we adamantly opposed and informed them would hurt businesses, raise the cost of doing business, be detrimental to the economy, or all of the above.

Nearly all elected officials have been willing to talk with us and hear our point of view, even if they don't agree with it; however, a couple of elected officials have not. They seem to forget that, regardless of our opinions or endorsements, they were elected to represent us all.

Beyond their stances, voting records on issues important to the chamber, and willingness to hear our views, other factors are considered. We look at how they conducted themselves in doing the work of the people. Are their positions well-thought out and balanced? Did they move issues forward to a decision in a timely manner or stall matters and delay outcomes? Have they managed time and the county's resources well? Did they run effective meetings? Do they understand the difficulties businesses face in trying to participate in the

process or, instead, do they continually ask why more businesspeople aren't present? Were they respectful to testifiers? As we look to take on new initiatives or change behaviors, do they appear to favor "carrots" or "sticks"? Do they take us up on our many offers to help and include us in discussions as they work toward solutions?

In the end, it comes down to a point on a line — a point where we believe they rank on our scale of support of the business sector and economy.

This information will be used as a tool in our candidate-endorsement process, leading to the Maui Chamber of Commerce's endorsement of "business friendly" candidates. This process begins after the filing cutoff, with all candidates for county and state offices invited to participate. These results will be shared with the community, because our goal is to encourage voter registration and elect "business friendly" leaders who will stand up for our economy, sustaining businesses and ensuring jobs.

To do this candidate-endorsement process, we are asking peo-

ple to get involved, even when the systems are challenging.

At community meetings, we regularly hear that people have become discouraged, questioning whether they can effect change and if elected officials are even listening. Businesspeople, busy keeping their businesses afloat, are having difficulty increasing their involvement. Others have told us they did not take the time to share their thoughts on issues because they thought logic would prevail and then found that they disagreed with the outcome. Some are actively engaged in the process, supporting candidates, voting and sharing their opinions on issues, etc., but don't experience the results they hoped for. And, there are scenarios in between. However, we can't let frustrations fester.

In these challenging economic times, there's a strong sentiment that we can't keep doing things the way they have been done and an urgency to make required changes. We need new systems, expedited processes, expanded public/private partnerships, a responsive government and great leaders, not just followers.

We are seeking rational and impartial leaders with vision, passion, strength, courage and resilience to work with us, move things continually forward in a positive direction, and get things done. We must emerge from these challenging times having made significant positive advancements, not having fallen behind.

To advance positively, we must elect the right leaders now and cultivate a cadre of leaders for the future. As we see the same people running for office time and time again, it begs a serious question: What are we doing to develop new leaders? We can't lose sight of the importance of ongoing leadership development.

Clearly, we are at a pivotal point. Now is the time to contemplate our options, assess the performance and leadership qualities of each candidate, and stand up for what we believe in. Our votes do count! So choose wisely, because we all have a lot at stake.

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