

# Chamber advocating for businesses on hot topics

## THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



**H**ot topics abound, and advocacy remains a top priority for the Maui Chamber of Commerce. The

chamber currently is working on a number of fronts that broadly impact businesses, the economy and our community, including:

- Finding unemployment-insurance tax increase solutions. The projected increase is huge and will impact all businesses in our state. Based on current legislation, the hike could be as high as 1,000 percent, taking the average business from paying a unemployment-insurance tax of \$90 to \$1,000 per employee each year. We are working actively with the Department of Labor & Industrial Relations to: make businesses aware of the unemployment-insurance tax increase, explore alternatives to the hefty increase, and find workable answers. This cannot become a nail in a coffin for businesses. The Department of Labor & Industrial Relations

has come up with alternatives to reduce the impact on businesses ([www.hawaii.gov/labor/uu/taxalternatives](http://www.hawaii.gov/labor/uu/taxalternatives)). We will hold another webinar with the department to review and discuss these alternatives Wednesday from 8:30 to 10 a.m. Please contact our office for more information.

- Reviewing the Maui Island Plan. Long on our agenda, the Maui Island Plan remains "top of mind" because this plan will set the direction and growth for our county for the next 20 years. Concerning the latest version, the chamber still has reservations — from overarching concerns about the plan itself, to its usefulness to specific measures addressed within the plan. Our Government Action Committee is reviewing the planning director's report now so we can share with the County Council areas we feel will have a negative impact and can promote elements that are helpful. We continue to encourage all, particularly business owners, to read at least the sections that directly impact them and to communicate their thoughts. The Maui Island Plan is too important not to be informed about the document or ring in on it. Currently, a presentation is being scheduled

with Planning Director Jeff Hunt, who will review the Maui Island Plan with chamber members. Stay tuned.

- Increasing awareness on interim in-stream flow standards. Historically, residents, agriculture and businesses used stream water. How much stream water will be able to be used going forward is a challenge that affects the entire community and our future growth. The topic is contentious for many, but we must come together on this subject to do what is in the best overall interest for Maui Nui. The chamber is sharing information, working with various groups to understand more fully the issue and different views, and looking at how we can help the community come to a beneficial resolution.

- Keeping pineapple growing on Maui. We are exploring

how we can assist the group of former Maui Land & Pineapple Co. executives and managers, who want to keep Maui in pineapple. This effort is still alive and proposals are being developed to save many jobs; continue agriculture on important ag lands; keep green space with roughly 1,000 acres in pineapple; and provide the county and state with Maui Gold, a much-desired pineapple product and staple in our economy. Time is of the essence as market confidence will continue to erode until the developed markets know the product again will be available.

- Engaging businesses in efforts to help displaced Maui Land & Pineapple Co. employees. With Maui Land & Pineapple and administration workers being laid off in the very near future, efforts are under way by the county, state and chamber to

help these individuals find new jobs. On Dec. 1, the state Workforce Development Division Maui Branch will hold a rapid-response effort at the Pukalani Community Center from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and the county is organizing a job minifair that same day for employers who have positions available. We are getting the word out to businesses that have employment opportunities and want to participate in this job fair.

- Gearing up for the coming legislative session. The Maui chamber is joining chambers statewide and many other business and industry associations to cooperate on legislative activities this coming session. We are strengthening our business-advocacy alliance to support legislation that helps businesses and to fight legislation that hurts. Priorities include economic recovery, unemploy-

ment-insurance tax, general excise tax, workers' compensation, visitor industry support, sustaining agriculture, education, environmental impact statement, water, infrastructure, land use, affordable housing, and others.

While some of the above are unintended consequences of challenging economic times, others are the result of legislative initiatives and, as such, are areas we can impact. What can you do? Make a difference by sharing your opinions, joining the chamber in speaking up for an improved business climate and economy, and taking action. Your say counts, and a unified business voice matters! Please call us at 871-7711 to get more involved today!

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