


H O N O L U L U

# Weekly



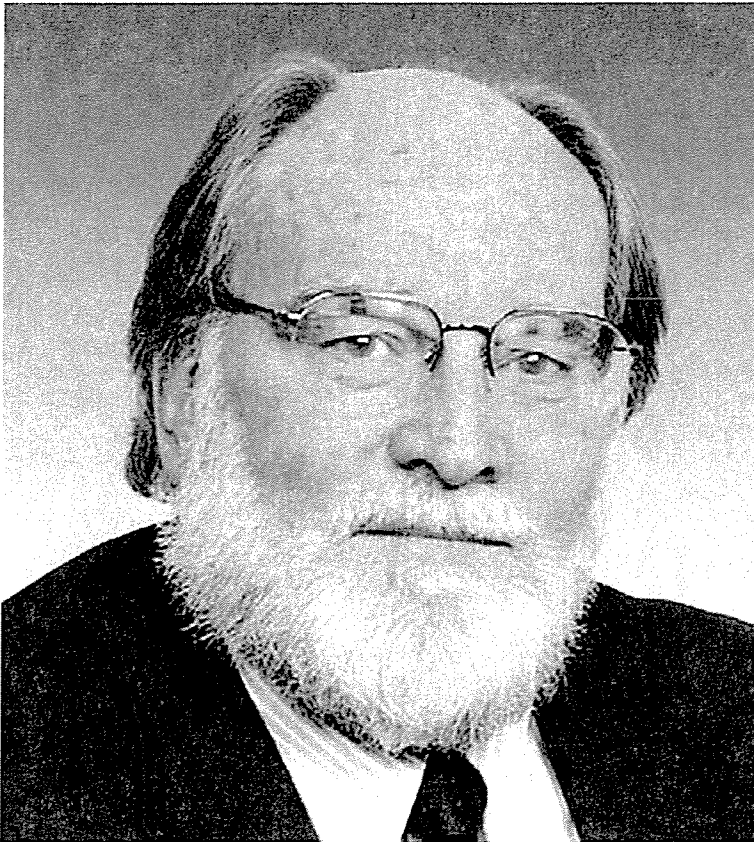
**AN EVENING WITH  
DAVID SEDARIS**

November 22 • 7:30pm Blaisdell Concert Hall

**GET YOUR  
TICKETS TODAY**

[CLICK HERE FOR TICKETS](#)

## POLITICS



### The super \$6K club, part II: Engineers vs. educators

*Abercrombie racks up big bucks as election day draws near*

BY ALAN D. MCNARIE | SEP 15, 2010

EXHIBIT K67

**POLITICS /** If one looked at the 2010 Democratic primary race for governor simply from the viewpoint of who's funding the candidates, it might go down as a battle between engineers and educators. The engineers appear to prefer Mufi Hannemann. The educators generally favor Neil Abercrombie.

Say the word "engineer" to most people, and if they don't think of trains, they probably conjure up the image of somebody smart, nerdy, logical and practical, a Dilbert type. They probably don't think of politics. But civil engineers, at least, can be highly political animals—their livelihoods often depend on government contracts. They don't often run for office—they leave that to the lawyers— but they do often open their checkbooks to politicians.

And they can play dirty, too: In 2006, for instance, R. M. Towill chief executive Russell Figueiroa paid the Hawaii Campaign Spending Commission \$50,800 in fines for illegal contributions to the campaigns of Arnold Morgado, Jeremy Harris, Ben Cayetano and Mazie Hirono. R.M. Towill takes in millions in government construction and planning projects, such as one it holds to determine the alignment for Honolulu's new rapid transit system.

Companies, like individuals, are not allowed to give a candidate more than \$6,000. And firms that hold government contracts are not supposed to contribute to candidates at all. But employees of R.M. Towill have dropped at least \$52,000 into Hannemann's war chest so far this election. They're probably the largest of Hannemann's super 6K clubs: firms whose employees have collectively contributed more than \$6,000 to a candidate. Campaign Spending Commission rules allow individuals within a company to contribute up to \$6,000 apiece, so long as they're not colluding, getting the money from the company or another person, or making the contributions under a false name.

R.M. Towill employees aren't Hannemann's only big engineering contributors. At least 27 of his \$6,000 donors make their livings at engineering, architectural or construction firms. Only 34 donors gave his main opponent, Neil Abercrombie, \$6,000.

Not that Abercrombie is totally immune to the engineer bug. A few engineering firms have invested in his campaign (nowhere near the numbers who have invested in Hannemann's), but members of one civil engineering company invested big-time.

Mitsunaga & Associates is a Honolulu firm that deals almost exclusively in public buildings; 15 of the 17 projects it showcases on its website, [mitsunaga-hawaii.com], are public buildings, including numerous public schools and fire stations and the Kapolei State Office

Building. Ten of its employees chipped in a total of \$38,700 dollars to the Abercrombie campaign.

We asked Abercrombie spokesperson Jim McCoy whether accepting that much money from a firm that did so much business with the state didn't create the appearance of a conflict of interest.

McCoy noted that modern campaigns, especially media buys, were costly, and that "in order to run a campaign and get your message out, you have to raise money." But he insisted, "Every time you make a donation, there's no quid pro quo."

All the campaign's contributions, he said, were legal—and he pointed out that 75 percent of them were for \$100 or less.

Perhaps Mitsunaga's engineers decided to go with Abercrombie because one of the firm's specialties is building schools, and Abercrombie's platform has been heavy with suggestions for revitalizing the state's school systems. He's gotten endorsements from the American Federation of Teachers and from the University of Hawaii Professional Assembly (UHPA)—and the latter, especially, has proven quite lucrative.

The UHPA endorsement is a rare display of the financial power that a union endorsement can sometimes wield. Both Hannemann and Abercrombie have garnered their share of such endorsements. But most unions have members working with a number of different companies, making it rather difficult to track their fiscal impact on a campaign.

UHPA members all work for the University of Hawaii, and the Campaign Spending Commission's website allows users to track donations by the employer given. When UHPA endorsed Abercrombie, it gave his campaign the maximum \$6,000 that it was allowed to give. But 40 or so UH employees also have chipped in, for at least \$31,000.

Teachers, even college professors, are not nearly as generous on average as civil engineers are. Only one of Abercrombie's educational angels, UH-Manoa educator Amefil Agbayani, is a member of the \$6K crowd. All the UH contributions put together, plus the \$6,000 that their union put in, was still only about equal to the financial muscle that 10 Mitsunaga and Associates employees flexed on the same campaign—and fell more than \$14,000 short of the financial influence that 12 R. M. Towill employees could generate for Mufi Hannemann's.

All of this points out the major challenge that any campaign finance reform must overcome. Forget quid pro quo, for now: Special interest groups are going to pump money into the

campaigns of people they believe will support their causes, whether they're grateful for the contributions or not.

Lucrative industries like construction and engineering have more money to pump into candidates who believe they should pump money into construction and engineering. If we prohibit the companies and other large entities from contributing, individuals within those entities can still pump money in, and super \$6K clubs from big-dollar industries going to out-muscle those from less lucrative ones, increasing their chances to stay more lucrative, even if it's at taxpayers' expense.

Despite this dynamic, Abercrombie's campaign seems to have gained some financial traction recently. The latest campaign spending reports show Abercrombie out-fundraised Hannemann, \$768,289 to \$332,840, during the period from July 1 to Sept. 3. But Hannemann goes into the final surge before the primary with \$791,787 of cash on hand, compared to Abercrombie's \$275,030.