

Honolulu Weekly

2006 Hawaii Voters Guide

Karl Rhoads :: State House District 28

Occupation:

Attorney

Current office (if any):

Downtown Neighborhood Board

Previous political experience:

Legislative Aide, State Rep. Marilyn B. Lee - 6 sessions; Legislative Assistant, U.S. Rep. Eliot L. Engel - 3 years; Legislative Aide, U.S. Rep. Louise M. Slaughter - 2 years; Intern, U.S. Senator John F. Kerry.

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1) Does anything need to be done to relieve congestion on O'ahu's crowded roadways? If so, what plans would you support?

Yes.

If so, what plans would you support?

Oahu needs an integrated transportation system that includes interconnected highway, rail, ferry and bus components.

2) How do we address the problem of homelessness in the Islands? Is there something that can be done to get people who want housing but who can't pay rent for housing?

There are a number of causes of homelessness and as a consequence the response to homelessness must be individualized. Drug abuse, mental illness, the high cost of housing, and unemployment all contribute to homelessness for specific people. To address homelessness we need to address these underlying causes.

Is there something that can be done to get people who want housing but who can't pay rent for housing?

There are a number of ways to provide housing for those unable to pay none of which are inexpensive or politically easy to accomplish. For example, more shelters can be built or subsidies to find housing on the open market can be provided

3) Rents and property taxes continue to go up. The number of affordable units continues to decline. What should be done to make sure there is housing for those who need it? Do you support rent control?

Again, none of the solutions are cheap or easy, but subsidies or tax credits could be provided to developers to build affordable housing. Affordable housing set-asides could be expanded. More funds to subsidize low income housing costs could be provided. More public housing could be built.

Do you support rent control?

No. Rent control too often results in less investment in the very commodity needed. The profit incentive to build more housing is taken away when rent controls are in place and as a result rental housing becomes scarcer.

4) In the past couple of years property values have increased by more than 30%. This increase (for most homeowners) will translate into much higher property taxes. Will you help reduce these taxes for fixed income homeowners? How?

Rising property values pose particular problems for those who are house rich and income poor. You hate to see a retired person living primarily on Social Security forced to sell their house of many years because property taxes have risen so high that they cannot afford to stay.

How?

I would be in favor of capping the yearly tax increase at the percentage the Social Security COLA rises for the year for those on Social Security. This would at least soften the blow of rising property values and the subsequent tax increases for our seniors and the disabled.

5) What state services are most in need of an overhaul, if any? Why?

The educational system is in most need of attention.

Why?

I think it is obvious that the educational system is struggling with low test scores, low teacher salaries, low morale and facilities that are falling apart. Important steps have been taken by the Legislature to address these issues, but more needs to be done.

6) How do you balance the needs of state residents with the needs of the tourists who drive much of our economy? (Specifically at beach and recreational areas)

It always irks me when I go to a "local" beach and find that the facilities have not been maintained to the same level as those at "tourist" beaches. We need to treat ourselves as well as we treat those who visit.

7) Many voters complain about growth. What would you say to voters to ensure them that you care about controlling growth?

This is a difficult issue because certain kinds of growth, specifically building more affordable housing units, is very important. An improved transportation system will help focus growth on major transportation corridors and will make it possible to preserve undeveloped areas for all of us to enjoy. In a macro sense, our high cost of living is probably the factor that controls immigration better than anything else we could do. There is some irony there because we all suffer from the high cost of living, but at the same time it protects us to a certain extent from another evil, excessive growth.

8) Fish populations are dropping. What do you do to bring those populations back up?
The bottom line, no pun intended, is that we need to stop fishing so much until fish populations have recovered. Of course, this will require that non-Hawaii fleets curtail fishing in our waters as well.

9) Prison populations are rising to such a degree that we are shipping prisoners out of state? Should this continue or should we find ways to change this approach? If change is advocated, what should be done?

I believe we need to quit sending prisoners out of state not only for their sake but for the sake of our economy. Even if it costs more to build additional prison space here, the money and jobs stay here. We have to overcome the NIMBY problem somehow. The federal government has established several base closing commissions to depoliticize the base closure process. A commission that drafted a master plan for placement of facilities that no one wants and then was voted on at the Legislature as a whole instead of piecemeal is worth considering.

10) The state is running out of landfill space. While the bottle bill has given more people the incentive to recycle--efforts at curbside recycling have stalled however--what solutions do you propose to help ease or solve our solid waste woes?

I am a strong supporter of recycling and believe we should move ahead with curb side recycling in addition to the bottle bill. Other cities of similar size have curb side recycling and it works just fine. Having said that, we will still need a landfill and I would include that in the master plan for unwanted facilities I discussed above.

11) We as a publication advocate sustainability. What do you do in your own life that brings us closer to have a sustainable society? What can the state do?

Like many other residents of the 28th District, I rarely use my vehicle. I have a neighbor who told me recently that he bought a car two years ago and that he has put a total of 7000 miles on it. Both my wife and I walk to work and routinely ride TheBus. We cannot continue to burn fossil fuel at the rate we are now and this is our little contribution in the fight against global warming.

What can the state do?

It can plan for the future. Fossil fuel maybe the cheapest way to go currently (if you exclude the negative externality of greenhouse gases), but it is quite likely that 20 years from now it will not be. Changing from one power generation system to another takes time and planning. We need to be prepared as best we can for integrating new sources of power into the generation and distribution system.

12) What can be done to support state farmers and state agriculture? Would you be in favor of property tax breaks for farmers?

Some fundamental decisions about the direction of agriculture in Hawaii need to be made. Many if not most of the staple food items we consume can be produced less expensively in other locations and shipped here, at least while the price of energy is still relatively low. That may not always be the case. We need to consider whether maintaining agricultural knowledge and know-how might be worth the cost of State support as a hedge against rising fuel prices when shipping in food from outside might not be viable.

13) Will you push for measures which promote alternative energy sources? If so, what alternative energy sources do you see as the most promising?

As I mentioned in a previous answer, we need to plan for the day when oil is no longer king. Due to the difficulties of predicting what the most promising technology is going to be, it is hard to

say with certainty, but I have to think that solar, geothermal and wind sources all make perfect sense for a state with lots of sun, volcanoes and trade winds.

14) Why are our schools falling behind? Why are our students testing poorly? What needs to be done to correct this?

Entire books could be written on this topic I am sure. While our public schools need help, I do not think we should lose sight of the fact that many Hawaii students, from both public and private schools, go on to excel at prestigious mainland universities. We also have to remember that school systems all around the country are struggling with many of the same issues we are. No Child Left Behind was not passed only to address the situation here, but the whole nation. Having said that we need to reduce class sizes, increase teacher pay and reduce bureaucratic inertia. Large class sizes reduce the amount of individual attention each student receives which particularly hurts those who are already struggling. Low teacher pay (49th of the 49 states reporting when adjusted for cost of living) results in nearly continuous teacher shortages and high turnover. Bureaucratic inertia slows improvements already decided upon and results in more attention being paid to filling out paperwork than to improving the educational experience for students.

15) What is your opinion of No Child Left Behind? What changes, if any, would you like to make to No Child Left Behind mandated measures? Given the lack of success of this program what do you think will be the logical result of NCLB?

It will be interesting to see what happens when the deadlines arrive for taking over "failing" schools. The federal government's incredible budgetary ineptitude excludes much help coming from Washington. Bush's tax cuts combined with no spending restraint of any kind plus the enormous fiscal drain of the ill-advised war in Iraq have all combined to put the federal government in a terrible budgetary mess despite the fact that in 2001 the nation was looking at budget surpluses for as far as the eye could see. The State clearly does not have the resources to address all the issues that are required under NCLB. What is going to happen? My guess is that NCLB will be scrapped, heavily amended or that the State will simply muddle along the best it can to meet the NCLB requirements, but will not be able to meet them. Education is incredibly important and we cannot abandon the effort to improve it just because NCLB is not working, but the way ahead is not at all clear.

16) What will you do to bring high tech jobs to the state?

I know enough about economics to know that choosing winners and losers in the marketplace is a risky endeavor. If we pick industries that do not have some kind of natural advantage in being located here, in the end they probably are not going to survive here anyway. In my view we should be eliminating existing special exemptions and credits. They in essence subsidize the activity exempted or given special treatment. It would probably make more sense to just lower taxes than to subsidize specific industries whose profits will probably go offshore anyway.

17) Would you support mass transit? If so, what form should that take (light rail, fixed rail, special bus lanes)?

Oahu needs an integrated transportation system that includes interconnected highway, rail, ferry and bus components.

18) Many Hawai'i elected officials supported Akaka bill. Would you support similar legislation if it comes up? Why or why not?

I do support the Akaka Bill. I believe Hawaiians should be given the same consideration native peoples of the American continent receive.

19) Do you support the Office of Hawaiian Affairs proposed transition to a sovereign entity?
Why or why not?
If that is what Hawaiians decide they want to do, I would support it.

20) What issue or issues most inspire you to act?
There are so many problems to work on that it is hard to say which most inspires me. I think it is affordable housing. Regular people should not have to work two or three jobs to get by and the cost of housing is so enormous these days that that is what is happening.

21) What is your current favorite TV show?
OK, I am a complete nerd. The New Hour with Jim Lehrer closely followed by the Simpsons which of course is also passŽ, but still a very funny show even after all these years.

22) What is the last book you read?
David McCullough's "1776."

23) What are your hobbies and interests?
I enjoy playing basketball, hiking and traveling.

24) Do you have a role model for your work as a politician? Who is it?
I have worked for Marilyn Lee in the State House for the last six sessions and I must say I admire her a lot. She works hard and she is passionate about what she is doing, but she manages to be passionate while still being civil to her opponents. The best quality she has, though, is that she is fearless. Of course she thinks about the next election, but she will take on the big controversial issues without hesitation and I would like to be like that.

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