

# Survey gives voices to needs of Maui businesses

## THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



In our recent survey on how businesses are faring, we asked chamber members, "What top

needs can the Maui Chamber of Commerce help you with?" Thus far, 99 individuals, or more than 12 percent of members, responded to the survey. They shared specific education, training and program ideas, and many commended the chamber for its continued businesses advocacy; call for responsible leadership from government; efforts to bring down the cost of doing business; and education and information on business issues. We greatly appreciate the feedback.

A majority who rang in wanted stronger efforts targeted toward our county, state and federal governments. Small-business grief with government

is escalating; we hear more concerns every day. Members shared discontent, hoping to be heard and looking for the chamber to assist with the top issues of government size and responsiveness.

Here is what businesses had to say:

- "Hold our County Council (members) accountable. They need to make the tough decisions to reduce the costs of our government that have bloated during the good times. Raising fees and taxes is not the answer. Many of the council members are not pro-business, and perhaps they do not understand the impact of their decisions (or lack of decisions). Perhaps the chamber can assist in educating them as well as publishing their voting records to assist the community in choosing candidates in the coming election."

- "Somehow convince our legislators and County Council that private businesses are the key to economic growth."

- "Realistic home-based business regulations."

- "Discourage waste and duplication of effort in government."

- "Reduce government intrusion into every aspect of business."

- "Elect officials who can relate to small business."

- "Pressure the county to stop trying to shut down home-based businesses."

- "To help keep taxes from increasing and focus on helping businesses to increase sales — therefore, we will pay more in taxes."

- "County, state and federal governments must downsize and cut expenses, like what we have had to do in our businesses. Raising taxes (revenues) is not an option for us in business, and should not be an option for government either."

- "Work on the lawmakers in Honolulu and (on) Maui business support."

- "Oppose the GET (general excise tax) increase. Oppose county where they are not dealing with real-property-tax appeals fast enough. Stop the oil-barrel tax. Expose government

arrogance on spending."

- "Have Maui County government (Mayor's Office) have liaisons with a focus on helping businesses that need immediate assistance with some kind of permit hassle. The liaisons should have extensive private-sector experience."

- "Stop all of the anti-business bills."

- "Lobbying government to help support small business."

- "Start a Tea Party, and get rid of the idiots running this country and state and county."

- "Let the State of Hawaii (administrators) know that they need to reduce their size, cut the number of employees, reduce government retirements, and stop the waste of our money."

- "Find us government candidates that will remove restrictive laws and lower taxes. We're sick of government inspectors crawling around our properties — looking for something they can fine us for."

- "Get legislators to stop the spending and regulation."

- "Help reduce unemployment

in the state."

- "We must cut the size of government in Hawaii or we will strangle the private sector. Government-sector employees need to start being prepared for the state to drastically cut retirement benefits since the pension funds are close to default."

- "Stop tax increases."

The question is: Are lawmakers listening? In Hawaii, when someone doesn't feel that another person is listening, you often will hear the speaker suggest the other person "clean the ears." Reflecting on the above comments, understanding these concerns, and thinking about the time and effort that go into business advocacy, I had a thought cross my mind (in a tongue-in-cheek moment) that the greatest challenge right now might not be the economy and reduced revenues as reported for so long, but rather ear-wax buildup, with a solution that could be as simple as Q-tips. I wish!

All jest aside, our economy is suffering, businesses are hurting, the size of government

has grown beyond what we can afford, and it is time for small business and the business sector at large to be heard. For that to happen, we have to face an uncomfortable truth: We have lowered our standards on what we expect from government and on what we hold government accountable for.

If we want true change and to be heard, it is up to us to believe, raise the bar, and elect those who will rebuild our economy and consistently support businesses. Then, we will receive our efforts' rewards: leadership; vision; a solid plan for moving us forward; an improved economy; economic diversification; lower costs; less unnecessary regulation; job creation, etc.

At the Maui Chamber of Commerce, we trust the rewards can happen and will continue our efforts toward those ends. Join in to make a positive difference.

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