

As your Editorial dated October 30, 2009 pointed out, Hawai`i is a unique state. However, it failed to mention the most relevant factors about Hawai`i that have contributed to its public education crises: Hawai`i has one of the lowest tax structures in the country, some of the highest costs-of-living indices and the largest migrant military population per capita.

Its ironic that the only Hawai`i decision-maker your editorial did not mention happens to be the most important one of all: The Hawai`i Legislature. In Hawai`i, it is the sole responsibility of the State Legislature to levy taxes to pay for the delivery of public education services.

To reference a child support analogy: we cannot blame the primary caregiver for the consequences that result from a deadbeat parent who refuses to continue to pay child support for education expenses.

Comparing the 2006 state and local taxes of families living in the largest cities in 30 selected states, the Census Bureau reported that the total taxes on Honolulu families earning \$75,000 a year was only 7.1% of income; which was 21% less than the average taxes of the comparison group.<sup>1</sup>

In 2005, the national average of total state and local government expenditures for public education was a 34%.<sup>2</sup> Hawai`i allocated only 28% of total expenditures on public education. Compared to the rest of the nation, Hawai`i under invested in public education by 18%.

Honolulu, Hawai`i ranks number six in the list of most expensive cities in the country behind only New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and Miami.<sup>3</sup> Since 80% of Hawai`i residents live in Honolulu, Hawai`i could arguably be considered one of the most expensive states to live in.

In 2006, the average cost for a single-family home in Hawai`i was \$538,000; that was 39% higher than the national average.<sup>4</sup> Compare the exorbitant cost of living in Hawaii to the wages earned by public school employees. In 2006, Hawai`i public school teachers on average earned \$49,292 a year; that is only half a percent more than the national average of \$49,026.<sup>5</sup> Many public school employees work second jobs just to make ends meet.

To make matters worse, almost 10% of the public school students are from migrant military families, most of whom maintain citizenship status with other states and therefore do not remit income taxes to Hawai`i. Even after deducting the Impact Aid Funds from the Department of Defense, the uncompensated expenses on the Hawai`i public school system remains in the hundreds of millions of dollars every year.

Unlike the decline in demand and consumption happening in private industry, public school teachers are working harder than ever to meet the compliance demands of federal and state mandates, while keeping students interested in learning.

During this economic recession, residential landlords are not giving discounts to tenants, the utility companies are not reducing their rates, and groceries in Hawai'i have not gotten cheaper. The difference between a furlough and a pay cut, is that furloughs allow teachers, librarians and janitors the time to work an extra shift at their second job to make up for the 8% reduction in their primary paycheck.

The Hawai'i Legislature must raise the necessary funds to pay for the delivery of public education to our children. The Obama Administration must allocate sufficient Department of Defense funds to fully reimburse states for the costs of educating the children of military families.

I pray that the aforementioned statistics and requests are not dismissed as coming from another elected official playing the "blame game". I am first and foremost an advocate for children presenting an argument and solution based on facts, reason and compassion.

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Hawai'i State Board of Education Member

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[http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/state\\_local\\_govt\\_finances\\_employment/state\\_and\\_local\\_government\\_finances.html](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/state_local_govt_finances_employment/state_and_local_government_finances.html) Table 429. Estimated State and Local Taxes Paid by a Family of Three for Largest City in Selected States: 2006. 2006 Median household income in Hawai'i was \$61,160 ( see

[http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/income\\_expenditures\\_poverty\\_walth.html](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/income_expenditures_poverty_walth.html) , Table 684. Household Income—Distribution by Income Level and State: 2006)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/state\\_local\\_govt\\_finances\\_employment.html](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/state_local_govt_finances_employment.html) Table 425. State and Local Governments—Expenditures and Debt by State: 2005

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.city-data.com/forum/Hawai'i/69993-cost-living-rank-world-country.html#ixzz0VeaSksPT> Source: Mercer Human Resource Consulting, 2006 Cost-of-Living Survey

Read more: <http://www.city-data.com/forum/Hawai'i/69993-cost-living-rank-world-country.html#ixzz0VeaSksPT>

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[http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/prices/consumer\\_price\\_indexes\\_cost\\_of\\_living\\_index.html](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/prices/consumer_price_indexes_cost_of_living_index.html) Table 707. Single-Family Housing Price Indexes by State: 2000 to 2007

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/ranks/rank20.html#footnote1> State Rankings -- Statistical Abstract of the United States PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' AVERAGE SALARIES, 2006