

## **Chamber, Sierra Club, ACLU and Labor join together to urge a NO vote to ConCon**

*By Randy Perreira*

Just a few months ago, far too many of us were at our computers, credit card in hand, getting frustrated trying to buy tickets to see Bruno Mars. Residents with Hawaii zip codes were promised to get first dibs... Well, we all know how that fiasco turned out. If we can't even ensure locals have access to purchase concert tickets, why should any of us confidently believe that we could keep out mainland powerbrokers and special interests from influencing a Constitutional Convention? It's foolish to believe our constitution would be easier to protect than the online sales of Bruno Mars tickets.

After many independent discussions about the future of Hawaii, an incredibly diverse group of organizations including the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii, Sierra Club, ACLU, Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, labor unions, and many others are standing together in an unprecedented coalition to urge everyone to vote no on the ConCon ballot question.

We don't always agree on every issue but we all agree on this: Hawaii already has one of the strongest constitutions in our country that protects our shared values and leaves little room for evasion of those obligations. This coalition exemplifies that there are ways to build consensus and advance what is best for our community without the high cost — and, high risks — that a ConCon represents *at this time*. The Chamber believes that without a clear benefit to the business community, it is not prudent to invest millions of dollars in a ConCon. The Sierra Club raises concerns that a ConCon could weaken existing protections for our environment, water resources, and our public trust lands. The ACLU cites that a ConCon could open a Pandora's Box for opponents of civil rights. None of us deny that Hawaii's government can and should do better. But we collectively question if a ConCon is the panacea to today's problems.

Those who want a ConCon argue that the 1978 Convention was a watershed moment in Hawaii politics, producing progressive policies that we can expand upon; therefore we should not shirk from the chance to re-write our constitution for the better. That argument would hold if our politics was not in the dire state it is in today: if this era of *Citizen's United* and unlimited Super PAC money did not have the means to overwhelm our democracy with their dollars. And when we see what's happening in Washington D.C., where so many of our norms of common decency are being disrespected, we would be naïve to believe that outside opportunists would resist benefiting themselves.

The money to run a ConCon would be far better spent on improving our electoral process and supporting the agencies charged with implementing the ideas enshrined in our existing constitution. We would be better off if we truly invested in protecting the environment and workers' rights, enhancing our infrastructure, and ensuring that native Hawaiians' needs are addressed. Let's focus on fulfilling the promises already contained in the constitution.

We do not believe that the people of Hawaii would knowingly vote against their existing rights. But neither do we believe that Hawaii's notoriously low voter turnout will magically reverse itself this November. We cannot allow the slim minority of today dictate the future of the vast majority.

When you receive your ballot, consider this: is convening a ConCon the best way to spend \$55 million of our taxpayer money? Can we ensure that there will be no outside interests buying our state? Are we confident that the electorate will do an about-face and show up in droves to actively participate in the process? Is the risk of losing all of our protections worth the diminutive possibility to gain more? If you, like me, are hesitant... I hope you will join us in voting No on the ConCon.