



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Funding is Shell Game, Not Good Reason for Veto

Sunday's (Honolulu Advertiser) editorial covered some of the important bills that are on Gov. Lingle's veto list, including the potential veto of HB 2843, also known as the "cargo fee bill," which would switch funding for cargo inspections from State General Funds to a 50 cent per 1,000 lbs. fee on incoming air and sea cargo.

The reason for the proposed change is to ensure that funding for this invasive species prevention program is tied to the level of incoming cargo and not the fluctuating state budget. This year is a perfect example of the need for this change. Last week Gov. Lingle mandated an all-agency 4% budget restriction on "nonessential services." To adjust, the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) has had to shift all payroll savings funds from unfilled positions in order to keep staff and operate at least at minimum levels at all ports. Inspection services will inevitably be delayed, since there will only be a skeleton crew to clear incoming air and sea cargo.

Governor Lingle is understandably worried about rising costs of living and working in Hawai'i. However, passing HB 2843 would switch funding for this important protection service (funded by Hawai'i taxpayers) to a much steadier special fund, dedicated to preventing new invasive species problems (funded by cargo importers, passed along to residents and visitors as pennies on the cost of imported goods).

The cost to Hawai'i's economy of the not-yet-present Red Imported Fire Ant is estimated at \$211 million per year (\$170 per person/year), the cost of having brown treesnakes in Hawai'i is \$405 million per year (\$330 per person/year), and the list goes on. Hawai'i residents that are willing to say that \$5 per year isn't too much to pay for keeping brown treesnakes out should give Governor Lingle a call by July 8.

(END)

Christy Martin is the Public Information Officer for the statewide Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS), a public-private partnership working to protect Hawaii from invasive species.