

Busting the myths about the business sector

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



Odd perceptions about the business sector can arise when ludicrous remarks

linger unchecked, and a few interesting myths are circulating now.

This column once noted past claims taken directly from public testimony that: Businesses “have no heart,” “don’t care about the environment,” and “are out to rape and pillage this community.”

Thoughtful people under-

stand that when we refer to businesses, we are actually talking about the people who make up businesses — Maui residents who work hard, care about this community and the environment, donate their time and resources, and desire a better quality of life. They recognize that such comments are without merit.

Nevertheless, such myths should not go unchallenged.

Myth: The chamber is Republican. Truth, the Maui Chamber of Commerce is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian organization made up of nearly 800 businesses that represent approximately 20,000 employees, with 88 percent of our members being small business-

es with 25 or fewer employees.

Our mission is to advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business, advocating responsive government and quality education while preserving Maui’s unique community characteristics. We promote business stances, not party positions or platforms.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce also endorses candidates and our endorsements are based on the alignment of candidate views with business interests. Both Democrats and Republicans have been endorsed.

Additionally, we hold elected officials accountable for voting on important business

issues and periodically publish scorecards to showcase their voting record on top chamber legislative priorities.

We are happy to meet and discuss business issues with all parties and candidates. In fact, numerous conversations are taking place with candidates asking about business concerns, and we recently introduced elected officials to small businesses when we took U.S. Rep. Mazie Hirono to greet Made In Maui members and helped Lt. Gov. James “Duke” Aiona connect with 100 small businesses in 100 days.

Myth: Businesses can afford to pay more to make up government revenue shortfalls. When our economy was grow-

ing, there was more money all around. Businesses expanded, augmented wages/salaries and benefits, and created jobs; personal income was higher and people acquired more and increased their standard of living; tax revenues were elevated, government grew and delivered additional services. However, in this economy, income is down overall and residents and businesses are hurting.

Since the recession, the majority of businesses saw profit margins significantly decline and expenses continue to escalate. They have slashed costs to the bone, exhausted reserves, found financing harder (if not impossible) to obtain, and many have had to make the

painful and heart-wrenching decision to lay people off. So, where is this miracle money coming from? If businesses could afford to pay more, they would be bringing back laid-off employees.

Although we escaped a state general excise tax increase this year, we may find ourselves in the same position next year as little was done to reduce the size of government. With a slow and choppy economic recovery projected, we must continue to ask lawmakers to create solutions apart from raising taxes and taking more money from our pockets. We appreci-

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ate Maui County Council members who are hearing the tax relief pleas and working on reducing county government. Businesses have had to do it. We know it is not easy, but it is the right thing to do.

Myth: Businesses are only looking out for the “big guys.” While the terms “big guys” and “little guys” are often used in testimony, without clarification on who is specifically being referred to, it is interesting that some feel labor organizations stand for “the little guy” and big businesses as representing the “big guy,” which is simply untrue. Businesses back “all guys” (men and women)

working in all levels of business.

Unlike government or labor, businesses actually pay each employee’s wages/salaries and benefits, and they do so without asking for a monthly fee (adding to family expenses) for the privilege of giving a job. It is time we realize who actually pays the paychecks. It is businesses and the working people that keep them alive that generate the money that sustains individuals, their families, the labor organizations and government. Disparaging businesses is not only wrong; it is absurd as businesses benefit all people.

■ *Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.*