

Keiki Caucus Summit

"Harness The Power Of Our Youth"

Monday, October 24th - 12:30 to 7:00 p.m. - State Capitol Building

This year's Keiki Caucus Summit was different from those I have attended for the last two years. This year, as the title suggests, youth were front and center.

There were about a dozen children ranging from elementary school through high school on the first panel. Their Interests included environment, safety, the economy, development of tourist facilities, education and more. Health issues were not high on the list except for prevention of diseases. In the question and answer session which followed the students' presentations, there was a lot of discussion relating to school safety, drug abuse and the home environment. In order to make progress in their lives, children and youth have to cope successfully with all these things and more.

The next panel was made up of young people, mostly high school students, who had accomplished something in their community. These activities included cleaning up the environment, Spunge Media (marketing to youth), work with diabetics and other forms of community service.

Then came the "break-out" groups as follows:

- Infants, toddlers, early childhood (0 to 5)
- Elementary children (6 to 12)
- Teens (13 to 18)
- Young adults (19 to 24)

I attended the Teens session. This was really different. All the teens were gathered around the long table in the arm chairs and we "professionals" were in the folding chairs. We did a brain-storming. Issues were put up under Education, Socioeconomic, Health, Environment and Other. As usually happens, by far the largest number of issues were listed under education.

After all the issues were listed, we voted to determine the top priorities. The results were:

Socioeconomic:

Increasing safety in the community * More attention to the unfortunate and homeless

Health:

A tobacco free environment everywhere * Suicide prevention in schools

Education:

Better quality facilities, bathrooms, water fountains, A/C, etc

Safer schools, more security, less fights and bullying

After school programs with funding and transportation

Environment:

Safer communities; weed and seed programs * Better waste management

During this process, the adults realized that they had a tendency to influence the choices of the students during the discussion. The suggestion was made that in the future the students should vote on their priorities separate from the adults in order to get a clear picture of their choices.

Next each of the four break-out groups reported their findings to the assembled attendees. This was followed by a closing speech by Dr. Reynold Feldman, a retired history professor. His opinion is that we adults are not making much progress in finding and implementing solutions to society's problems. Maybe it is time to start empowering youth at an early age to make a fresh approach looking to the future. He believes the youth are "the only ones who can save us", not now, but sometime in the future. We must train them to take on this responsibility starting very young. We must listen to their concerns and work with them in follow-up to implement their solutions.

In closing, Sen. Chun-Oakland announced that she and Rep. Arakaki will be raising funds in the spring. These funds will be used by students for training in community action as well as implementation of projects relating to community needs.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Drorbaugh

November 14, 2005