

Response should be smart choices, not ‘shared sacrifice’

(Honolulu Star-Advertiser Insight Article, January 23, 2022)

By Clint Churchill and Brian Barbata

Climate change is real, as should be obvious to all of us. But we take exception with the proposition that the people of Hawaii need to “sacrifice,” as the headline on a recent commentary by John Kawamoto stated (“Climate change requires shared sacrifice, Island Voices, Star-Advertiser, Jan 5). What we need to do is make informed choices that matter to Hawaii, and understand the tradeoffs so we can value them.

In another recent op-ed, Max Markrich, a consultant on climate change adaptation, summarized it well (“Hawaii needs to prioritize climate adaptation, now,” Dec. 12): “Hawaii’s energy-related CO2 emissions (amount to) 0.4% of energy-related CO2 emissions for the country. Investing time, attention, and resources to combat climate change by reducing the state’s total emissions is tilting at electric windmills.”

There are things Hawaii can control and things it cannot. The people of Hawaii can make many decisions that lessen its reliance on fossil fuels, but every decision has implications and consequences. The Practical Policy Institute of Hawaii was established to provide fact-based education and analysis of such policies, particularly to legislators and leaders who are faced with considering how we react to climate change as it concerns Hawaii directly.

The climate issues that will impact Hawaii the most, and which we intend to address, are the following:

- Windmills
- Solar panels
- Sea level rise
- Electric vehicles
- Fossil fuel transition
- Tax incentives
- Cost of living impacts
- 100% renewable energy

Purposely missing from this list are some of the global issues Mr. Kawamoto is worried about, but which are not relevant to Hawaii’s ability to control in any meaningful way:

- Carbon sequestration

- Climate Justice Action
- Carbon pricing

No response to climate change will be free. Some will say anything we can do is a small price to pay. No one really knows what future changes in weather patterns will be. Every forecast has a range. Projections of sea level rise over the next 80 years, for example, go from 10 inches to 6 feet. Whatever happens will take place over a very long time, and we will see it coming, mitigate, and adapt. Hawaii is not going to affect the impact of global climate change, but we will all be impacted by the policy decisions of our state and local governmental leaders.

Our family members and friends have been leaving Hawaii for years because of the rising cost of living. Here are some numbers from the Grassroots Institute of Hawaii:

“Hawaii’s net loss of 10,358 residents in 2021 marked the fifth year in a row that the state has shown a population decline, according to the Census Bureau’s population estimates program. According to a 2019 survey by Pacific Resource Partnership, the main reasons people cited for leaving Hawaii were its high cost of living, 86%, and the high cost of housing, 83%.”

Should we allow our responses to climate change to make this exodus worse? Our leaders and the public need to have the facts before heading further, at high speed, down the road of approving every conceivable response to climate change. Do we ignore the cost implications of these decisions? Do we “sacrifice” our landscapes and seascapes to achieve the unachievable, while contributing unmeasurably to the global picture? What is the value of visual pollution? Is Hawaii subsidizing other places that fail to bring their own emissions under control?

We believe it’s time to pause and review the assumptions implicit in the 100% renewable goal, namely:

- (1) a realistic evaluation of the cost to achieve 100% renewable energy;
- (2) an assessment of implications of the 100% goal while assuring dependable electricity;
- (3) an assessment of land use trade-offs and visual blight; and
- 4) a reassessment of Hawaii’s contribution to reducing greenhouse gases.

The results of these reviews will impact not only what Hawaii becomes physically, but the emigration of our children and grandchildren to the mainland, and the unintended consequences of misunderstanding the road ahead.

Does Hawaii need to achieve some lofty goal that simply won’t make any positive difference in our daily lives? We need to think about these matters, because they are serious choices, not required sacrifices.

Kailua residents Clint Churchill and Brian Barbata represent the Practical Policy Institute of Hawaii

HAWAII'S CLIMATE CALCULUS

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CLIMATE

Continued from E1

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Please see CLIMATE, E4

ISLAND VOICES



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