

VIEW FROM THE HILL

A Conversation with
U.S. Senator Brian Schatz

Tuesday, April 23, 2019





Pictured from left to right: RCUH Executive Director Sylvia Yuen, U.S. Senator Brian Schatz, RCUH Board Chair Eugene Bal III.

FORUM REPORT

The 2019 RCUH forum was held at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa IT Center and livestreamed throughout the state. A total of 255 people registered for the event—116 in-person attendees and 139 live-stream participants.

RCUH Executive Director Sylvia Yuen welcomed attendees and thanked the forum co-sponsors: the University of Hawai'i and the University of Hawai'i Association of Research Investigators. She encouraged everyone to participate in the Q&A session and indicated that Gene Bal, chairman of the RCUH Board of Directors, would ask Sen. Schatz the emailed questions from those who were live-streaming the event. She then called on UH President David Lassner to introduce Sen. Schatz.

About U.S. Senator Brian Schatz

As Hawai'i's senior United States senator, Sen. Schatz serves on four Senate Committees essential to the future of Hawai'i. He is also Chief Deputy Whip, a leadership position that gives him a greater role in shaping policy and communications for Senate Democrats.

Prior to joining the U.S. Senate, Sen. Schatz served in the Hawai'i House of Representatives from 1998 to 2006 and was elected lieutenant governor from 2010 to 2012.

Sen. Schatz also served as CEO of Helping Hands Hawai'i, one of the state's largest non-profit community social services organizations, from 2002 to 2010.

INTRODUCTION OF SEN. SCHATZ BY PRESIDENT LASSNER

I'm proud to introduce senior U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz who was appointed to the office upon the death of Sen. Daniel Inouye and has been elected to the position twice since then by the people of Hawai'i. I first met Brian when he was a young environmentalist, which he kind of still is. Between stints in politics and elected office, he has been a school teacher and has led a social service non-profit as well. He's a great friend to the University. Brian's father was a truly beloved faculty member in our John A. Burns School of Medicine, and he "donated" his twin brother to us, where Stephen leads our P-20 Partnership for Education program, which is focused on getting more of Hawai'i's youth into and through college successfully, among other purposes.

Among Brian's major Senate committee assignments, particularly those of relevance to us, are these:

- Appropriations Committee, where he's the ranking member of military construction and veterans' affairs;
- Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, where he's the ranking member of the subcommittee on communications, technology, innovation, and the internet;
- Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee, as well as the
- Indian Affairs Committee.
- And last month he was named to chair the newly-launched Senate Democratic Special Committee on Climate Change, which will investigate, hold hearings, and issue findings on economic and national security consequences of climate change and how acting on the climate change crisis presents significant opportunities for jobs, public health, and the economy.

Brian has become remarkably influential in a very short time in the Senate and in Washington. Hawai'i is truly privileged to have him serving us in Washington, D.C., and UH is extremely proud to welcome him here today.



UH President David Lassner introduced U.S. Senator Brian Schatz to open the RCUH forum.

PRESENTATION BY SEN. SCHATZ

I want to thank everybody for being here. I want to thank Sylvia, and I want to thank the former interim chancellor [referring to President Lassner] for the introduction.

It really is an honor to be here and to see so many familiar faces—people with whom I've worked for many, many years and people with whom we still maintain strong partnerships. As David said, this is personal for me. UH Mānoa is actually the reason that I grew up in Hawai'i. My dad was a professor at the University of Michigan Medical School, and when I was two, he moved to Honolulu so he could become a part of the UH Medical School. He was a principal investigator, the chairman of the Department of Medicine, and an instructor to more than half the doctors in Hawai'i. His work at UH was just the beginning of my family's history with the University.

When I graduated from college on the mainland, I came home and started working at the Mariculture Research and Training Center, where I mostly cut hao bush and fed the fish. My very good friend, Bruce Miller, who was running the Sea Grant Extension

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Service at the time, asked me how it was going. You know when they ask you when you’re 20 whether you want a field job or an office job, you say field? And then, about seven weeks into cutting hao bushes and catching the bus, transferring probably three to four hours a day on the bus and feeding the fish, he asked, “How are you doing, you want to move to the office?” I said, “I think I want to move to the office.” We were able to form a partnership with the University of Hawai‘i Sea Grant College Program.

My wife Linda is a proud graduate of the School of Architecture and my brother is executive director of the P-20 initiative, and he would like me to point out that I don’t loan him to anybody. I tell you this, not because this story is unique, but because this story is common. People have made their lives in Hawai‘i using UH as a catalyst, and that economic dynamism, the intellectual achievement and political activism, have defined this flagship university since its inception. UH is synonymous with Hawai‘i. If UH does well, Hawai‘i does well. And so, like almost everyone across the state, for me the story about UH isn’t just about dollars, research, or

projects or infrastructure or science. It is personal. It’s a common thread that brings us here, that keeps us here, and provides us with opportunities to contribute to the community and make a life in Hawai‘i. At the practical level, it’s also about money.

It’s also about extramural funding. People still have a tendency to underestimate the impact of this system on the overall economy. We have tried very hard to quantify that dollar amount, but suffice it to say, it’s in the hundreds of millions of dollars every year, probably more than that. And then there’s the research itself. I’m the son of a principal investigator, so while I lack the scientific background, I understand the value of what we do. We truly have world-class research in ocean and earth sciences, culture and the arts—and before I make a list, I apologize if you didn’t make the list, I just had to cut it for time—in culture and the arts and Asia-Pacific region and biological sciences, astronomy, data analytics, clean energy . . . and that is not a full list. And so the science is spectacular and the achievements are significant, but most of what happens is because of you and your teams, not because of me and my team.



So what is my role here? I see two things that I can do. First, it is important for public leaders to sing the praises of the University System, especially in a political and media environment that seems to reward heads on spikes. So allow me to shout this from the rooftops: the University of Hawai'i System is excellent; it is a source of pride and intellectual vitality and, while oversight is appropriate and continuous improvement is necessary, we gain nothing by tearing down one of our most important institutions.

Second, and here's the practical part: if you need federal funds, I'm here to help. That is a two-step process. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I have to figure out what line items are important for both Hawai'i and the nation and then, generally speaking, you have to put yourselves in a position to compete for that money. And then we're going to have to figure out appropriate ways to help you to be successful.

So let's zoom out and look at the big picture for a moment. Overall, federal funding has increased, not decreased, over the last four to six years. This is a little surprising given how incompetent we appear generally, as a Congress, in terms of making the regular appropriations process work. But in the end, when we get an appropriations bill done, when we get an omnibus or minibus done, we've been able to do so in such a way that, generally speaking, increases domestic discretionary spending, increases research money, increases CDC money, NIH money—even the Department of Energy saw an increase. Even the EPA



Sen. Schatz understands the value of the research conducted at the University of Hawai'i.

was flat funded for the last couple of years, so the unstated bipartisan cooperation, I think, continues to be the rule rather than the exception. There's an old saying about the Congress and that is there are really three parties: Democrats, Republicans, and Appropriators. And we've been able to do well, not just for Hawai'i, but for the country. The bottom line is this: that every executive agency has seen an increase in federal funding and Hawai'i is probably getting a little more than its fair share of that.

But it is a post-earmark world, and so that means we have had to change the way we pursue federal funds. It is not enough for me say, "This is good for Hawai'i." We have to explain how the federal expenditure to



Hawai'i is consistent with federal policy and federal objectives. And that's not just a rhetorical change—that is how you have to justify the funding.

Let me give you a couple of specific examples. We have been able to increase the amount of money that the Navy, the Office of Naval Research, has put into energy research, which happens to be great for Hawai'i. But that's not the argument we make. The argument we make is that we need to figure out base energy security, energy resilience that can save lives and money on a forward operating basis. When we provide money for the East-West Center, it is no longer a gem that we are proud of. It is a service that is provided to the State Department and the Department of Defense for implementing our Asia-Pacific strategy. So, describe what you are doing as pursuant to federal policy at the national level, work with the federal agencies, learn their priorities, become a trusted and reliable partner, and describe whatever proposal that you are making in terms of national priorities and work with federal agencies so that they back you up.

I'll give you one example of how exactly not to do it. I won't name the industry, but its representative went to a federal agency and said, "Please don't cut us because this is what percentage of our gross state product you represent to us." If you're a federal agency, you're thinking, "Well, that's entirely not the point, and boy, that's a lot of money we're spending over there in Hawai'i." So you really have to think in terms of: we can help you to implement your federal mandate.

Couple of other pieces of advice. Let me back up and say: my first piece of advice is talk to my staff, really. Because each project is different, each program is different, each application is different.

So sometimes it just takes a phone call, sometimes it takes a letter of support, sometimes it takes an appropriation, so let us help guide you. We promise you one thing: you'll get a straight response. When I was in the not-for-profit sector, I appreciated the fast "no." If I can't help you, we'll let you know if that's outside of our scope, if there's a procurement process we can't interfere with, or whatever it may be. If it's a "no," we're not going to make you wonder. And if it is a "yes," we will go all in for you.

Couple of other things. It also helps if local agencies, non-profits, and business organizations are aligned in terms of their priorities. So building partnerships, not just within our community but potentially with other universities, always strengthens the proposal. And I just want to emphasize something about partnerships. We may take for granted our ability to partner in a way that seems like a totally impossible task in a lot of other states. To get state, county, federal, not-for-profit, and business leaders aligned on a proposal—there are the mechanics of it, but in a lot of instances, that's just five to six phone calls—one afternoon of you calling people you already work with. Because we are an island state, we have that ability to partner, and that is a real differentiator. So continue to emphasize that differentiator. There are states where the county is at war with the state and the university system is split apart and all the rest of it, so they're competing with themselves and federal agencies are often hesitant to pick among competing factions within the same community. Our ability to hang together, I think, is really important. One specific point: as long as you're not competing with each other, I'm very likely to be a "yes" on a letter of support for a grant application. And, I'd just like to emphasize that because I remember doing grant applications, and it's kind of a big deal in some instances to get one of those, so again: as long as

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Attendees mingled after the forum's Q&A session, while others stood in line to speak to Sen. Schatz one-on-one.

it's consistent with our values and as long as you're not competing with each other and I have to pick one over the other, I'm going to be a "yes" and try to be as supportive as I can.

Some nuts and bolts, and then we'll get into questions and answers. We start taking appropriation requests in February until early to mid-March. We do that through the website so my staff can answer questions about how to make those requests. But basically just know that our website, which has a form, is not a black hole. Human beings read it, and that is the best way to let us know that you have a priority. There's obviously the aspect of internal processes within the University of Hawai'i or within RCUH that you have to also sort of be aware of. Then we share the request with the relevant Senate Appropriations subcommittees. One of the ways that the subcommittees make life easier for themselves—and this is really a staff thing—if you miss the deadline, it's a "no." That way you don't have to sort out probably fully a third of the requests for funding because most people are still in the business of missing deadlines. So we take great pride in getting our letters in and delineating our priorities. I would say fully half of the Senate doesn't make their own internal deadline and then

they're out of the game. If you come to us in April or May with a request, you're waiting until the following year. Likewise, be aware of the funding schedule for the federal agencies. They are not the same as the appropriations schedules, so you need to be aware of them. So, the bottom line is this: call our office. That's the first thing to do. Call our office. We want to help and we understand that some of this advice was conceptual, but some of this is really going to depend on the particulars of your enterprise. Form partnerships, and most of you are really good at that, but I want to emphasize that most mainland states are not good at it so it really is a differentiator. Do things in time and on time. You really just have to be aware of these deadlines because they are just searching for a reason to say no and not making the deadline is the cleanest way for them to decline. And then coordinate with the University of Hawai'i System.

So let me do a quick overview of federal funds over the last couple of years. This will be just a quick survey and then we'll open it up to questions. Again, an overall increase in every single executive agency's budget: NSF, NASA, and NIH are particularly important to the University System. A couple of million dollars for coffee research from USDA, \$2

Forum highlights

- Federal funding has increased over the last four to six years.
- Incorporate national priorities when developing proposals for federal funding.
- Contact Sen. Schatz's office for guidance regarding federal proposals.
- It helps to partner with local agencies, non-profits, businesses, and even other universities.
- The Senator's office will accept appropriations requests from February through early to mid-March.
- Be aware of the funding schedules for federal agencies; they are not the same as the Appropriations Committee's schedule.

million for a better weather forecast. In health and education we had a decent increase in impact aid funding, which is great: \$8 million for Native Hawaiian-serving higher education institutions, \$36.5 million for K–12 Native Hawaiian education, and \$17.5 million for Native Hawaiian health. The important thing to note: we either held or increased the line on the original mark—and these were earmarks at one point, but not now. So we've seen \$2–3 million of increases when there was additional resources and, importantly, that becomes the new baseline. In conservation we've really done well. I am dedicated to conservation, as many of you are, for reasons unrelated to extramural resources, but it is important to say we are now able to bring in outside money. We doubled the amount of money for the management of Papahānaumokuākea. We've got \$800,000 for the ahupua'a in He'eia, and the reason I call it ahupua'a in He'eia is because I can't pronounce estuarine. How did I pronounce that? Did I do that right? Okay, nationwide, \$27.5 million for the NOAA coral reef program, and we've been able to maintain funding for monk seals and sea

turtles, which matters for conservation purposes and for tourism as well. We received \$220 million for the Ala Wai Watershed project, which I know is receiving mixed reviews from community members who want to know why and how this is going to work. But I think it's really critical as we deal with the impacts of climate change and fight against the cause of climate change. We just have to be realistic about what's about to happen to our communities, and this money is incredibly important in terms of literally keeping Honolulu safe.

On the military side, as the MILCON VA ranking member and top Democrat on the subcommittee, we've been able to do pretty well in terms of MILCON. The reason MILCON, in my view, is important is that if there's a question about the viability of the Department of Defense in the state of Hawai'i, the best way to look at how any organization is planning is to look at its capacity for infrastructure and infrastructure spending. The funds spent in the state of Hawai'i indicate that Hawai'i continues to be central to the Asia-Pacific rebalance. Of course, the East-West Center has undergone a real transformation over the last several years. Remember that its original mission was to educate the general public about the importance of Asia. That's an old mission because people today really

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Sen. Schatz's presentation was warmly received by attendees, both in-person and online.

do understand the importance of Asia. Now we're all about building partnerships, and there are really exciting things happening with island nations on climate change and climate adaptation. There's a new board and a new president and a new energy there and we're doing quite well.

I'll end with this. We really have done well together because we've been able to use the appropriations process to support many of your priorities. One of the things that I learned in my first couple of years, and we worked with David's office to get smarter about this, is that we didn't really know how to prioritize UH projects. People were coming in and saying, "This seems like a good idea so can you find us some money. Right, this is what you do." It was a little haphazard, and our ability to do analysis on what was a high priority for UH or the state of Hawai'i was limited because people were coming in at all times of the year in all forms and fashion. We've gotten better, and we are now working very closely with the University President's office. We have been more and more successful, but I don't have any illusions that we may not be doing this as

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well as we eventually need to be doing it. So please, if you feel that you're not part of this process, either connect with David or my office or both and say, "How do I plug in here?" And it may be that all you're doing in the first instance is to let us know what you're doing so we can decide to plus up a basket of money that you can compete for. But I am very anxious to make sure that everybody who chases extramural resources knows that we're here for you. Not that we're *going* to get you the money, but we're certainly going to do everything that we can to try.

So, I thank you for this opportunity. To me it really is an honor to join you at the RCUH Forum. I feel that my dad is in the room, and I am looking forward to your questions. Thanks very much.