



# 10 points to return Hawai'i to the people.

Hawai'i's government has become out of touch with our local communities and working people. Wealthy donors, corporations, and special interests have hijacked our democracy, and as a result, we aren't making enough progress on the serious challenges we've been facing for decades. If we are ever going to build back a Hawai'i where our working families can live and thrive for generations to come, we need to fix our democracy first.

Hawai'i is not for sale. We need bold, courageous campaign finance and election reform to counter the influence of money in politics. The points below are 10 things that we could do today to return our democracy to the people.



**KAI KAHELE**



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## 10 POINTS TO RETURN HAWAI'I TO THE PEOPLE

### 1 Supercharge Hawai'i's Policies for Public Funded Campaigns

We need better publicly funded campaign policies. Having robust publicly funded campaigns will even the playing field by allowing more candidates to run who may otherwise be disadvantaged by wealthier and more connected opponents. We should make it easier for our working, local people to serve their communities in elected office. Publicly funded campaigns are the reform that makes other reforms possible. (For more information on Hawai'i's existing partial public funding program, click [here](#).)

At minimum, we should examine the following reforms for our public campaign funding program:

- Increase the campaign expenditure limit adjusted for COLA and inflation.
- Keep the current “minimum qualifying contribution amount” ( $\leq$ \$100 monetary contributions from Hawai'i residents) that must be raised to participate in the program, but supercharge the “match” for qualifying contributions to 8:1.
- Raise the maximum amount of public funds available.
- Explore models for a “clean election program” for the option of full public campaign funding.

### 2 Lower Campaign Contribution Limits

Hawai'i allows individuals to donate up to \$6,000 to candidates for Governor. What average family could ever afford that donation? A \$6,000 maximum donation means that candidates for Governor spend less time engaging with our working people and more time courting the wealthiest in Hawai'i and pandering to out-of-state money. In the State Legislature, it isn't much better. Hawai'i allows individuals to donate up to \$4,000 to Senate candidates and \$2,000 to House candidates.

Let's lower these out-of-touch maximum contribution amounts and give a bigger voice to our working people, while also incentivizing candidates to participate in the state's partial public funding program.

#### Proposed Maximum Campaign Contributions

If participating in state's partial public funding program:

- Two-year office: \$500
- Four-year non-statewide office: \$1,000
- Four-year statewide office: \$1,500

If *not* participating in state's partial public funding program:

- Two-year office: \$250
- Four-year non-statewide office: \$500
- Four-year statewide office: \$750

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### 3 Cap Campaign War Chests

Hawai'i allows campaign committees to carry over all of their campaign funds from election to election. An elected official can raise hundreds-of-thousands of dollars every election cycle, which scares off would-be opponents, allowing the incumbent to run unopposed.

As a result, some incumbent elected officials across Hawai'i have massive campaign war chests that they've accrued over years. This just isn't good for democracy. I believe that the money donated to a candidate's campaign is for that campaign - not unlimited future campaigns.

I'm proposing we prohibit the unlimited carryover across election cycles to 20% - not to exceed \$50,000.

### 4 Prohibit Corporate-to-Candidate Contributions

Direct corporate contributions to a candidate's campaign is the type of "pay-to-play" politics that has made our government less accountable to the people. Like 22 other states, Hawai'i could ban direct corporation contributions and lessen the influence of corporations - particularly out-of-state corporations - on Hawai'i's democracy.

### 5 Prohibit Union-to-Candidate Contributions

I am a proud card-carrying union member. I believe that an organized workforce is good for our working families and our democracy. However, the most powerful unions in Hawai'i have enormous influence on our elections through the candidates to whom they contribute and endorse. Like many other states, Hawai'i could prohibit direct union to candidate contributions. Candidates for office should be focused on serving the electorate and voters - not on which unions will provide a maximum contribution.

### 6 Prohibit and/or Regulate "Bundling" of Contributions

"Bundling" is the practice of collecting contributions from friends and associates to bypass campaign finance limits. It is a legal loophole where lobbyists for a business or organization, for instance, might collect contributions from employees or association members and present those checks to a candidate at the same time. Bundling also occurs when multiple employees of the same company donate to a candidate with the possibility that those individuals will be reimbursed by their company. This tactic used by the corporate and lobbying world to sway our democracy needs to be checked. We can enact laws that would require each contributor to certify that their contribution is from their own funds, and that they have not been provided the contribution, or will be reimbursed later.

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### Term Limits for Statewide Elected Officials - 8 Years Max

Our state legislature and statewide elected officials were intended to be composed of civil servants who are representative of their communities - not career politicians. I am proposing an 8-year consecutive term limit for all statewide elected officials, meaning that an elected official could serve up to 8 years before vacating their seat for at least one election cycle. This will incentivize new, fresh-minded leadership to enter public service to tackle our biggest challenges.

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### Term Limit for Office of the Governor - One 6-Year Term

Our Governor is already running for re-election after the first two years of their term. This impedes the hard work of delivering for the people of Hawai'i and reaching the goals laid out to the people of Hawai'i. Changing the Governor's term limit to one 6-year term would be a first in the country. It would allow the Governor enough time to pursue their agenda and campaign promises without diverting their priorities for the sake of the next election cycle.

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### Ban all Fundraisers and Contributions During Session

The special interest lobbying effort in Hawai'i is very powerful. This power is typically shown during the legislative session in the form of campaign contributions. Lobbyists want bills advanced that will ultimately help their organizations, and campaign contributions are a legal way to put pressure on legislators to fulfill their agendas. Special interest legislation can be good when it is in the public's interest, but when it serves only private interests and specific organizations, it needs to be checked. We can achieve this by banning legislators from fundraising during the legislative session, as well as banning the solicitation and acceptance of contributions during the legislative session.

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### Reform Automatic Voter Registration

A healthy democracy requires voter participation. Right now, Hawai'i has front-end automatic voter registration. This means that when a resident applies for a license at the DMV, they are asked if they would like to be registered to vote. This is a great step, but we can go further. We need back-end voter registration where residents are automatically registered to vote through applicable state agency transactions beyond just the DMV. Under this approach, registration information is automatically transferred without having to opt-in. This means more people will receive mail-in ballots, thereby increasing voter participation.