USE FULL VETTING FOR GRANTS IN AID

There is something inherently wrong with a system to vet applications for city grants and/or Oahu nonprofits is circumvented — and Honolulu City Council members must put a halt to that dubious practice.

It’s easy to dismiss, to say why they keep trying. Politicians look good if they’re able to secure large sums of taxpayer money for constituents without oversight. In the current fiscal year ending June 30, the council handled over $2.1 million for 23 agencies — mostly nonprofits, though, will likely be retained — above the $1.5 million already set aside through the standard grants process.

That grants process is the result of a successful City Council amendment approved by voters in 2012 that sets aside for nonprofit groups one-half of 1 percent of all city general fund collections. With it comes a thorough vetting process by the city’s Grants in Aid Advisory Commission through the city’s operating budget process.

This year, the commission reviewed 107 applications from nonprofits and 56 were awarded grants for fiscal year 2017, totaling $13.4 million. The worthy groups include the Blood Bank of Hawaii, the Hiemion Lands Council and Special Olympics Hawaii.

Still, the Council felt compelled to add another $30 million for 20 organizations, some of which already been awarded funding through the regular grants process.

The controversy surrounding grants to homeless etc. does not diminish the need for the council to be held accountable for the public’s money.

Students’ behavior was disrespectful
Lanakim Kula, who was an 11-year-old, student at the Kamehameha Schools, was arrested for robbing a convenience store. According to the teacher, Kula and his friends were stealing items from the store.

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Don’t throw out policy on teacher travel
It looks like the state Board of Education may nudge back to the drawing board — blockboard — to review a policy on teacher travel that was prompted by a new, virtual ethics opinion.

That state Ethics Commission issued a new ethics opinion that requires all teachers to travel for professional development to be considered for professional development travel.

But in this case, the opinion was issued by the Ethics Commission on Oct. 2, 2015, and it was signed by the ethics commission.

Let adoptees see their adoption records
Adoptees shouldn’t have to wait until their biological parents die to learn their identities, which was the case with Jody Guillen, who was given up for adoption in 1983. He was just 13 at the time, and he was very young at the time, the state doe...
There is something inherently wrong with a system that set up for-profit grants for cities to get aid for grants in aid for Cuba nonprofits is circumvented — and Honolulu City Council members put a halt to that dubious practice.

It's easy, though, to see why they keep doing it. Politicians look good if they're able to secure large sums of taxpayer money for constituent causes. In the current fiscal year ending June 30, the Council tasked with $28 million for 23 agencies — only $300,000, though, will likely be released — above the $8.1 million already set aside through the standard grants process.

That grants process is the result of a Honolulu City Charter amendment that took effect in 2013 that sets aside for non-profit grants one percent of all city contracts, subcontracts and programs. It comes as a thorough vetting process of the city's non-profit grants in Ald Advisory Commission and a grant limit of $132,500 per recipient.

As a matter of principle, the Council should ensure all non-profit grants are submitted for vetting by the advisory commission — rather than inserted into the city's operating budget and sent immediately. This year, the commission received 98 applications from non-profits and 58 grants for fiscal year 2017, totaling $2.5 million.

Three groups that fall under the City's VTAF program include the Blood Bank of Hawaii, the Boy Scouts of America Aloha Council and Special Olympics Hawaii.

Still, the City Council accepted 29% of the applications, or one that had already been approved, despite the grant limit.

The controversy surrounding grants-by-unnecessary puts Mayor Kirk Caldwell — who helped brok the additional funding takes away from other city services — against the City Council. Ultimately, it becomes just another political fight between the city's administration and legislative branches that the public can do without.

Council Chair Ernie Martin said he believes a bill is pending to address the situation.

Martin said Council members individually consider requests made by nonprofit agencies and submit an amendment for consideration to the Budget Committee. However, nonprofit applications for funds through the grants-in-aid process have their applications lightly scrutinized over several months, and the commission approves or denies the grant based on a detailed scoring system.

There needs to be a level playing field among the nonprofits.

To underscore his opposition, Caldwell has released the money for nearly all of the Council additions for non-profits over the past few years, and the City Council listens to the recommendations of the non-profit organization. There has been no documentation of a "safety and security risk" by the City Council.

There will be a huge taxpayer cost to move it in its current condition.

And speaking of risk to the harbor — when such a risk as discharging pet waste into the harbor — do we really need to discontinue the practice of cleaning up and landfilling the harbor and not contributing to the environmental cost of the $25.3 billion operating budget, those millions account to a percentage of a proper cost that the public expects for accountability.

Students' behavior was disrespectful

Launa Wong in his weekly Hawaiian language program praised the Kamehameha students not standing while the "Spangled Banner" was played. Students and Wong understand or teach simple respect. When I am in my largest classroom, students not standing when the national anthem is played, it is polite to the people of that country, however different and disagreeable their government is, to stand while their anthem is being played.

I respect that the Chinese who attended that "echo park" (stuck sitting), the students are disrespecting every other American and everyone who has served in the military and those who have given their lives for their freedom, and are overlooking their noses at all non-Hawaiians.

If they truly feel this way, Wong should not accept any non- Hawaiianischer hognote index included in his salary or retirement and the graduate of this school should not accept any U.S. government scholarships or grants.

Gary R. Johnson

Annie Sheh

James Grouwen

Barney & Clyde

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Falls of Clyde could be safely relocated

I support an appeal of the state Department of Transportation decision to evict the Falls of Clyde from its moorings ("The fall of Clyde," Star-Advertiser, June 15). The unique historical value of the ship mandates that it be preserved.

Yes, the funding has been slow, but it moves something other than creating space for yet another commercial venture. It will cost far less than $32 million to restore the hull to a point where it can remain afloat.

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Harry Palmers

Downtown Honolulu

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Let's have a railroad at edge of Chinatown

If we have to stop the railroad, let's stop it somewhere useful. It was originally supposed to serve the Ali Moana Center. That may be a real road, but downtown is not.

A second real road was the Dwa edge of Chinatown (now Beretania and River streets) would serve a tourist train for Chinatown but would be an easy walk (or relatively quick bus ride) to downtown. And it wouldn't desecrate the downtown waterfront as the current route would.

Pumping the line through Ka liihi wouldn't be cheap or easy. But it would do less harm. Stopping at Middle Street would not.

If this is the preferred option, let's stop where we are now. Asian can always get off there and catch a bus.

Art Wallace

Kapolei

Florida incident was attack on humanity

The tragic shooting incident in a gay nightclub in Orlando, Fla., was an act of terrorism and a hate crime committed by a self-radicalized jihadist, not only against innocent gay people but against humanity.

It is time to raise awareness about terrorism and the fight against terrorism, which is spreading like cancer across the globe.

The extremists are using the internet to recruit young, unstable individuals who are easy to manipulate and brainwash them to become jihadists to carry out attacks and radicalize millions in crowded areas in their local communities. These fanatics have twisted certain passages of the Qur'an for their own selfish purposes to promote in power, create fear, and impose their rules on the entire world.

It is also time to close loopholes and make stricter gun laws to prevent more violence. Everything can be replaced, but loss of human lives can't be replaced with any material objects in this world.

Raj Kumar

President, Gandhi International Institute for Peace

Why isn't state liable for its TMT error?

The Third Circuit Court determined that the Thirty Meter Telescope met the right requirements for a permit for the telescope on Mauna Kea.

The Hawaii Supreme Court disallowed the permit and sent the matter back to square one because the hearing officer at the Board of Land and Natural Resources made a mistake.

Even though the TMT consortium was innocent of any wrongdoing, it suffered the brunt of the consequences — nine years of work and millions of dollars lost.

Was this a failure by the state of Hawaii to provide full disclosure? What if it had revealed at the very beginning that the application was not complete? What if mistakes made by the agency in charge?