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Editorial | Island Voices

Amendment 7 seeks to slow climate change

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Guillermo. Hilda. Kilo. Ignacio. Jimena. Darby. Lester. Madeleine.

No, this is not the beginning of a classroom roll call. This is a list of named hurricanes that threatened or hit our islands as tropical storms in the last two summers alone.

Along with extreme weather events, we are also experiencing extreme heat — spurring unprecedented calls for “heat days” that would cancel classes as our children attempt to learn in a changing world. With climate change, it’s not just the climate that is changing around us, but also the rate of that change — quickening exponentially as each day

passes.

While our state's efforts to help slow this change are notable, Hawaii can't reverse what's already done. Our state must prepare by mapping out a strategy to shore up beaches and protect homes from rising waters, fortify our infrastructure against dramatic flooding, and keep our keiki cool without straining the grid. And we must do it now, rather than waiting until the worst effects of climate change have taken hold.

Proposed City Charter Amendment 7 seeks to do just that for Oahu. A "yes" vote will create an Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency, empowering the city to "promote stewardship of natural resources for present and future generations." Once passed, the office, housed with the managing director, will be a hub of information and a driver for cross-department coordination to protect our shorelines and preserve our fresh water supply.

The office and its director would track climate science and potential impacts on city facilities; coordinate actions and policies of departments within the city to protect economic activity and coastal areas and beaches; and coordinate with state and federal agency partners.

There is currently no entity charged with these critical tasks, and the clock is ticking. With a budget already under pressure, we need to make sure that every investment our city makes is one that will also be resilient in the face of change.

A “yes” vote on Amendment 7 offers sound planning that builds on significant support for our island. Honolulu was among the most recent awardees of the Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities prize, joining a diverse list of forward-thinking urban communities from Washington, D.C., to Seoul. The prize provides financial support to help hire a chief resilience officer (CRO) and craft a resiliency plan for Oahu. The office would immediately provide a home base for the CRO and create shared purpose and understanding among city and county agencies.

Indeed, other vulnerable cities around the nation such as Miami are quickly recognizing that they can’t afford NOT to carefully consider the impacts of climate change in an uncertain future. By creating an office, efficient and effective climate change-related planning will be woven into the fabric of our city and county governance.

Climate change is a reality that will undeniably impact our ability to manage our city, our infrastructure and our budget over time. It is critical that resilience in the face of it becomes an integrated part of the way we do business.

Vote “yes” on Charter Amendment 7, and protect our beloved Oahu for residents today and our children tomorrow.

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