

# SPEAK Freely

## Increasing Civic Participation and Informed Decision-Making

As part of its mission to enhance the diversity of thought on O‘ahu and increase civic participation in the democratic process, ‘Ōlelo continues to use television to develop and support initiatives that provide residents with the ability to express their First Amendment right to free speech—without the barriers of cost and facilities.

One of these initiatives is *Capitol Commentary*, an “open mic” service videotaped at the State Capitol and available to anyone who wants to discuss



*Naturalee Puou interviews Patricia Hamamoto, superintendent, Hawai‘i State Department of Education, for Capitol Commentary.*

legislative developments or community issues. Legislators and community leaders often use the program to reach out and inform their constituents about current legislation.

In recent years, ‘Ōlelo has partnered with O‘ahu schools to involve students by having them serve as *Capitol Commentary* reporters. On the opening day of the state legislature, trained student crews research issues and videotape interviews with lawmakers, organizations and citizens for airing on ‘Ōlelo.

A few years ago, as high school students in Wai‘anae and Nānākuli, respectively, Chasity “Aloha” Davis and Naturalee Puou participated in *Capitol Commentary*. Now, the two are college intern managers at ‘Ōlelo’s Wai‘anae CMC and are training other students in the process.

Says Davis, “Young people often think, ‘We’re not supposed to be at the Capitol; this is only for adults, and we can’t

say anything.’ But getting to know our legislators and being able to ask them about issues, face to face, is powerful for the youth. They gain knowledge, build confidence and become involved in the political process.”

Puou adds, “It’s important to have a voice. No one else will know what you want. You have to speak for yourself. Otherwise, you’re forfeiting your right as an individual.”

‘Ōlelo also facilitates open government by telecasting Honolulu City Council and Legislative hearings in their entirety. Most recently, ‘Ōlelo introduced on-demand archiving of City Council meetings via the internet—taking access to government meetings to a new level. (See sidebar.)

### Building an Informed Community

‘Ōlelo is committed to the First Amendment right to free speech and provides residents with the tools to share their messages completely unedited and uncensored. ‘Ōlelo’s clients express a diverse range of views through their programs.

Additionally, ‘Ōlelo contributes to increased civic participation by partnering with various nonpartisan groups.

Over the years, ‘Ōlelo has aired League of Women Voters’ forums and conferences on public issues, such as state constitutional and city charter amendments. The League has also been a partner of ‘Ōlelo’s *VOTE!* services, which feature candidate debates, speeches and community roundtable discussions during the election season.

“Democracy thrives when citizens play an active role in elections and government,” says Jean Aoki, board member and former president, League of Women Voters of Hawai‘i. “‘Ōlelo is helping residents become more educated on issues that affect their lives, so they can make informed choices as they exercise their right to vote.”

‘Ōlelo also provides political candidates with equal access to its services, facilities and cable channels year-round.

## ‘Ōlelo Services At a Glance

### Government Meetings On-Demand Via the Internet

Anyone with broadband Internet access can now view Honolulu City Council meetings, which are archived at <http://www.honolulu.gov/council> for up to one year. This service is made possible through a partnership between ‘Ōlelo and the City Council.

### VOTE!

Each election year, the *VOTE!* service seeks to create an informed electorate. *VOTE!* provides candidates with a forum where they can address issues relevant to their constituents. It also includes roundtable discussions with community leaders, debates and amendment discussions.

### Capitol Commentary

During each legislative session, government leaders, community groups and the public are given the opportunity to address issues and concerns regarding upcoming bills and legislation.

### O‘ahu Speaks

This is an ‘Ōlelo staff-facilitated “open mic” service for O‘ahu residents who want to share a timely community issue-oriented message, which can include a time-sensitive announcement of an event or request for participation.

‘Ōlelo Community Television has also aired Hawaii Institute for Public Affairs (HIPA) issues-oriented events and conferences, including the *Hawaii Business* magazine-sponsored series on sustainability.

“‘Ōlelo is an important ally and resource for the community,” said William Kaneko, president and CEO, HIPA. “It is helping to elevate the level of decision-making among policymakers and community members by providing a channel through which information can be shared and discussed. This ultimately contributes to a stronger Hawai‘i.”