

Throwing mud at Cayetano is a failing tactic for rail hui

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By David Shapiro

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The Star-Advertiser's new Hawaii Poll reflects a strong public repudiation of the most offensive example of pilau politics in this year's election: the sleazy effort by Pacific Resource Partnership to discredit the anti-rail mayoral campaign of former Gov. Ben Cayetano.

PRP, an alliance of the Carpenters Union and unionized contractors, has spent a reported \$500,000 so far on a media campaign that falsely attempts to place Cayetano at the head of a "pay-to-play" political culture in the 1990s.

PRP further strains credibility with a series of "Imua Rail" ads that offer a pie-in-the-sky view of the supposed benefits of the city's troubled \$5.26 billion transit project.

The good news for those who value honesty and civility in political campaigning is that these ubiquitous ads appear to have failed miserably in moving public opinion on either Cayetano or rail.

According to the Hawaii Poll, Cayetano's support is holding steady at 44 percent — the same as the previous poll in February — with Mayor Peter Carlisle at 27 percent and former acting Mayor Kirk Caldwell at 25 percent.

On rail the poll found that 50 percent of the registered voters surveyed want the project stopped, while only 44 percent want to push ahead — also about the same as in February.

The numbers strongly suggest that Hawaii voters have little stomach for grubby campaigning such as PRP's that plays fast and loose with the facts.

The candidates themselves get this. Their own ads have vigorously advocated for their virtues and held opponents up to scrutiny but so far have stayed within the bounds of fair play.

The same has been true in our hotly contested congressional races, in which candidates have respected sensitivities of local voters by avoiding the pure nastiness that has become the norm in mainland elections.

The PRP ads stand out for their malice and dishonesty in claiming that Cayetano used a "loophole" to avoid paying back illegal donations from his 1998 gubernatorial campaign and presided over a pay-to-play culture.

Bob Watada, the respected former executive director of the state Campaign Spending Commission who headed the pay-to-play investigation, called the allegations "bogus."

Watada said Cayetano did nothing wrong, owes no reimbursement, advanced the cause of campaign finance reform as governor and is one of the most honest people he knows.

The only loophole here is the one created by the U.S. Supreme Court's Citizens United decision, which allows

PRP to spend heavily on spreading misinformation about Cayetano without identifying the donors who are financing the ads in hope of making a bundle off of rail.

The bachi is that the dirt these special interests are shoveling appears to be landing not on Cayetano, but on the coffin of Oahu rail transit.

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