

Hannemann 'collaborates' to get what he wants

By (Editor's note: The six co-authors of this opinion piece are listed at the end.)

Mufi Hannemann's campaign has characterized him as a "collaborator," and rightly so. But which kind of collaborator is he -- one who works together for the common good, or one who works with others against the common good?

Where does Mufi fit?

His management of rail transportation is a fine example of how he collaborated with construction unions, big landowners, engineering consultants and large contractors, all of whom will benefit financially from this project. But will the taxpayers of Honolulu get the most efficient and cost-effective mass transit? We will never know because ex-Mayor Hannemann never collaborated with the public through any meaningful dialogue.

Instead, Hannemann orchestrated a one-sided propaganda blitz promoting rail in a series of tightly-controlled public meetings and advertising campaigns. Dissenting voices trying to present more cost-effective and flexible alternative mass transit solutions were not allowed any significant time to speak at these "public" forums, managed by city officials and paid consultants who presented fancy slide shows and talked at length, while surrounded by slick pro-rail posters.

At most of these community meetings, questions from the audience needed to be in writing, which the city's moderator then selectively chose for responses, with no chance for follow-up discussion or any fruitful dialogue. Official answers were oftentimes erroneous and misleading, following the usual line of unrealistically optimistic projections for rail.

At one memorable meeting on city property at Blaisdell Center, advocates of transit alternatives were given a few minutes at the two-hour meeting to speak but when asking for a little more time, with strong support from the audience, speakers were pushed away from the podium. Civic-minded residents showed up for these meetings looking for balanced information but instead were spoon-fed the city administration line.

Mr. Hannemann also failed to collaborate with our local architects who have expressed strong reservations about the visual impact of an elevated system, telling them at first they were "too early" with comments and subsequently dismissing them as "too late."

There was never transparency in transit planning and, as a result, alternative solutions were never fairly discussed in public -- it was only about Hannemann's rail. There was no attempt by the city to accommodate and respect those with differing views, or bring people together.

These one-sided tactics were used by Hannemann throughout his rail campaign, which spent millions of dollars of taxpayer money on fancy brochures, consultants and ads with misleading, one-sided information about the controversial project.

Hannemann collaborated with unions that paid for hundreds of pro-rail TV and radio ads that were misleading but effective in convincing a slim majority of the public to approve this massive, questionable project.

The mayor's final act of collaboration before resigning was to issue premature but binding construction contracts with favored corporations, even though federal approval to move forward has not been granted.

These unfortunate events clearly show that Hannemann's claim about bringing people together is political double-talk, the opposite of truth -- pure hypocrisy. Mufi Hannemann's campaign has aptly named him a collaborator, but is this the kind of collaborator we need to guide us through the difficult times ahead into a better future for Hawaii?

This was signed by Linda Wong, Diamond Head; Amy Kimura, Makiki; John Lee, Wahiawa; Wayne Miyashiro, Mililani; Dennis Callan, Honolulu; and Robert Bretschneider, Waipahu.