HAWAII MEDICAL ASSOCIATION RESCUES AMA BOOKINGS FOR HAWAI’I

In the world of medicine, physicians are usually recognized for their brilliance in curing the sick and saving lives. So it may have been a first when a group of local Hawai’i doctors “killed” something and were lauded for their efforts earlier this year.

It was June 2015, right before the American Medical Association’s (AMA) Interim Meeting of the House of Delegates Meeting, when Dr. Jeff Akaka, M.D., an ‘Elele and member of the Hawaii Medical Association (HMA), learned that a delegation from Michigan planned to introduce a resolution to cancel all future AMA meetings in Hawai’i in the interest of being fiscally responsible.

AMA had already booked its December 2017 and 2022 Interim Meeting of the House of Delegates at the Hawai’i Convention Center with each meeting estimated to bring $14 million in economic benefits to the state.

Dr. Akaka wasn’t going to sit back and let this happen. Instead, he organized a delegation of HMA members, including Dr. Roger Kimura, Dr. Robert Sloan and Dr. Jone Flanders, and Dr. Christopher Flanders, who went to the House of Delegates meeting in Chicago with one goal: KILL THE BILL!

And they were successful! But it wasn’t easy. Dr. Akaka highlights the efforts it took to defeat the resolution and why the ‘Elele Program was critical in saving this important meeting for Hawai’i.

When did you learn about the Michigan Delegation’s resolution?
It was only a week prior to the House of Delegates meeting that we found out. The proposed resolution was submitted late by the Michigan Delegation. It was not in the original packet of resolutions we had previously reviewed.

How did the Elele Program help in your efforts to “kill the bill”?
Working with a partner like Debbie Zimmerman was a Godsend. In less than 24 hours, she provided me with the resources and data I needed to reverse the misconception perpetrated in the resolution through our testimony before the Reference Committee. It claimed meeting in Hawai’i would cost $1 million. However, our data proved it would cost AMA half that amount, including the use of the Hawai’i Convention Center.

Were there others there in support of Hawai’i?
A member of the AMA Board of Trustees, Dr. Carl Sirio of Pennsylvania, verified in his testimony that meeting in Hawai’i would cost $688,000 versus $1.2 million in Washington, DC. and that meeting in Dallas was comparable to the Hawaiian Islands. His testimony turned the tide for us. With momentum, the Hawai’i delegation lobbied the other states hard for the next two days.

How did it all end?
For Debbie and I, this was just like old times proactively and vigorously countering attacks to the challenges placed in our path. It reminded me of what we did together between 1998-2001 to secure the 2011 American Psychiatric Association Annual Meeting for Hawai’i. With our successful defeat of the resolution, we managed to retain the AMA meetings in Hawai’i for 2017, 2022, and hopefully a few more before someone challenges the bylaws again.
I remember the day I met Dr. Greg Moore, a professor of marine geophysics in the University of Hawai‘i’s School of Ocean and Earth Sciences and Technology, who told me he felt Hawai‘i had the potential to host the Asia Oceania Geosciences Society (AOGS) Annual Meeting.

We were talking about which geoscience societies might be interested in having a meeting in the Islands. Dr. Moore was already aware that the American Geophysical Union (AGU) Ocean Sciences Meeting came to Hawai‘i every few years, but mentioned that he was planning to attend the AOGS meeting in Hokkaido in the summer and would check to see if they were interested. AOGS alternates meetings between Singapore in odd-numbered years with other venues in even-numbered years.

“I knew that the AGU Ocean Sciences meeting always had good attendance, so I asked the people familiar with the AOGS organization about the possibility of coming to Hawai‘i,” Moore said. “They thought it was a long shot, but said that with some lobbying and good justification, they would at least consider it. I told Debbie that I could coordinate a local committee made up of SOEST people to start the ball rolling.”

When bids for the June 2018 AOGS meeting were announced, Dr. Moore put together a Local Advisory Committee consisting of other SOEST faculty, including Dr. Bin Wang from the Department of Meteorology and International Pacific Research Center, Dr. Yuqing Wang of the Department of Meteorology and International Pacific Research Center, Dr. Bo Qiu from the Department of Oceanography, Dr. Peter Mougins-Mark from the Hawai‘i Institute of Geophysics and Planetology, and SOEST Dean Brian Taylor.

The ‘Elele team met with Meet Hawai‘i to collaborate on a customized marketing piece on Hawai‘i’s scientific points of interest for AOGS. This greatly enhanced the bid, but unfortunately the proposal was rejected due to cost. We decided to try again, this time sharpening our pencil and getting a little more aggressive. We leveraged Hawai‘i Tourism China’s relationship with AOGS’s president in Beijing who spoke to him about the benefits of having the meeting in Hawai‘i and how it would allow AOGS to attract more North American and European scientists.

The president agreed and allowed Hawai‘i to make a formal presentation to the Council during its Annual Meeting in Singapore this past August. Dr. Moore and Janet Kowata, Director of Accounts for the Asia Pacific for the Hawai‘i Convention Center, delivered the winning presentation beating out two cities from Korea.

This meeting will bring roughly 2,000 scientists from around the world to Hawai‘i in June 2018 and is estimated to have an economic impact of more than $9 million.

When asked how does securing a meeting like this for Hawai‘i benefit the university and the state, Dr. Moore said “It brings people here and many of the scientists bring their families with them. UH benefits because it allows us to showcase our facilities and research in a way that we can’t do with meetings outside Hawai‘i. Many of our students can attend and make contacts that will be valuable for them in the future.”

Like other pitches between the ‘Elele and Meet Hawai‘i teams, we were able to show the decision-makers the positive benefits of meeting in Hawai‘i and the numbers proving the cost was in line with other destinations.

“It will be a pleasure to host our geoscience colleagues from Asia and Oceania, especially given their many collaborations with faculty from UH and our shared interests,” said Brian Taylor, Dean of SOEST.
Visitor industry representatives from Hawai‘i recently met with Congressman Mark Takai in Washington, DC to begin discussions about bidding on a future National Guard Association of the United State Conference. Hawai‘i last played host to this prestigious gathering in September 2013 when it was held at the Hawai‘i Convention Center. The citywide meeting drew more than 3,000 attendees, their families, and industry vendors and had an economic impact of $14 million in Hawai‘i. From left, Vickie Omura, Vice President of Citywide Sales and Marketing, Hawai‘i Convention Center; Epooni Perkins, Director of Sales for National Accounts, Hilton Hawaiian Village Beach Resort and Spa; Congressman Takai; Charlene Nakamura, Director of Sales, Starwood Hotels Waikiki Complex; Sherri Thadeus, Regional Director of Accounts, East, Hawai‘i Convention Center; and Debbie Zimmerman, ‘Elele Program Director for the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority.