

University of Hawaii feels pressure to produce following legislative decision



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By [Anna Hrushka](#) – Reporter, Pacific Business News

After working for three years to get the Hawaii State Legislature to pass the [University of Hawaii's](#) innovation package, which allows the school to collect revenue through engaging in joint ventures and limited liability partnerships, Vassilis Syrmos, vice president for research and innovation at UH, said the school's next challenge will be dealing with the pressure to produce.

“The state of Hawaii is one of the first states where its Legislature went as far as to give unprecedented powers to the university with respect to tech transfer and commercialization,” Syrmos said during the opening panel discussion of the Future Focus Conference, hosted by the Hawaii Business Roundtable and UH.

In June, Hawaii Gov. David Ige signed House Bills 425 and 827 into law. The two legislative measures facilitate the transformation of discoveries and inventions generated by UH research into commercially viable enterprises.

“On one hand, we’re extremely happy because we are one of the very few institutions with such authority within the country, and on the other hand, inversely, we’re in the position where they can say, ‘We gave you that authority, now let’s produce it,’” Syrmos said.

Syrmos was joined on the panel by Augustine Cheng, CEO and chief legal officer of Arizona Technology Enterprises; State Sen. Gilbert Keith-Agaran; Darren Kimura, executive chairman of Live Action; and American Savings Bank President and CEO Rich Wacker.

The panel was moderated by Howard Dicus of Hawaii News Now.

Syrmos said the legislation puts the university in the position to capitalize on its research, but added the results won’t be immediate.

“It’s not that the university now is going to make multimillion dollars from day one or day two,” he said. “First of all it’s a long-term process. And secondly, the university can make money through other avenues, not just from the tech transfer. We can make money by starting a business and by producing students that work with these businesses.”

“It’s not about the money that’s going to the university, it’s about the contributions to the economic development of Hawaii,” added Wacker, who serves as vice chair of the UH Foundation.

While HB 425 exempts technology transfer activities conducted by UH from certain sections of the State Ethics Code, Syrmos said activities will still be regulated.

“It’s not like the university can do whatever it wants,” he said. “We just monitor the ethics code when it applies to tech transfer within the university. We have plenty of regulations, federal and state.”

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