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COMMENTARY

## Secrecy helped spawn protest at university

By Miriam Sharma

Some have called the actions and position of those protesting the proposed Department of Defense UARC, and the way it has been pushed through by university administrators, "childish and disrespectful."



During three so-called "consultation" meetings convened by Chancellor Peter Englert, protesters used theater to express themselves and shouted out from the audience. Subsequently, they occupied Interim President David McClain's office. These actions express the extreme frustration of a large number of people to the shroud of secrecy covering the administration's proposal for a military research center and to its disingenuous call for dialogue.

Last September, the Board of Regents instructed the chancellor to hold wide-ranging and open discussion on the issue. This has been disregarded. Initial discussions held at the law school were pro-UARC charades with paid consultants on the project masquerading as objective speakers.

During three subsequent sessions held on campus last month, questions and comments to the chancellor and his administrative cohort regarding the desirability of the UARC, or University Affiliated Research Center, and the secret process were ignored, unanswered or went unheard.

Under such conditions, innovative ways of breaking the silence had to be found, and that is exactly what the group in opposition has done. They have finally caught the attention of the interim president, and access to the media has proven to be a brilliant tactic for putting their ideas out there.

Other critics of the protesters have found their gentle sensibilities so affronted that they have declared they are "ashamed to be part of the same university."

Perhaps these people have not read the news articles commending the protesters for politeness, cleanliness (no shoes allowed in the president's suite) and respectfulness. Perhaps they forget that peaceful civil disobedience as a form of protest against decisions made by those in positions of authority and power has a long tradition in this country. The ideas of Henry Thoreau influenced Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and a generation of students and youth involved in civil rights and anti-war movements, among others.

Resistance to hearing what the group has to say remains, and there is an undercurrent that patronizes and trivializes the protesters' position. This is despite the mass of material available on their Web site ([www.stopuarc.info](http://www.stopuarc.info)), in the statements they have repeatedly made in different forums, in the printed material of their positions, and in the exposure in local newspapers, Ka Leo, KTUH and Hawaii Public Radio.

Others accuse those opposing the UARC as being anti-science types who are against such research, indeed, any research. They want to turn UH into a "cow college." Once again, there is the refusal to acknowledge that universities do carefully deliberate on the nature and sources of their funding and that this can never preclude



UARC protesters camped out on the lawn in front of Bachman Hall on the UH-Manoa campus.

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a consideration of ethical, moral and social concerns.

UARCs are about weapons development and military research, no matter how you try to dress them up. Scientists across the country have been protesting the unprecedented allocation of government funding into biodefense and the building of a network of high-security laboratories that leaches money out of basic research and may well contribute to the erosion of this country's public health infrastructure.

The moral of the saga is that all sides must be heard and respected if informed decisions reflecting what is best for our university and the community it serves are to be made. Honesty and openness lead to the wisest course; the exercise of power alone only obscures the fault lines of the pro-UARC arguments.

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