

Carlisle railroading citizens on other side of rail debate

By David Shapiro

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It's disappointing that Mayor Peter Carlisle is again answering thoughtful criticism of the city's \$5.3 billion rail project by trying to bully the critics.

After former Gov. Ben Cayetano, retired Judge Walter Heen, businessman Cliff Slater and law professor Randall Roth pressed their concerns about rail's management, costs, ridership and environmental impact, Carlisle dismissed them as the "Gang of Four," a term that a rail PR consultant came up with.

Does the mayor really think it's appropriate to equate four distinguished citizens who have outstanding records of public service with Chinese communist thugs accused of treason?

Carlisle especially went after Cayetano, who along with the others is a plaintiff in a federal lawsuit against rail, accusing him of viewing rail from a "mansion on top of a hill" and being "stuck in ... the finances of 30 or 40 years ago as well as the solutions of 30 or 40 years ago."

Cayetano has reached a stage of life where he's beyond bullying and quickly shot back, "Hey, Peter, my living in a so-called 'mansion' on the top of a hill didn't matter to you when I supported you for mayor, stumped and gave speeches for you, contributed personally and raised money for you."

All true. Carlisle trumpeted the former governor's support in his campaign, and said in one election night interview that Cayetano — whose views on rail were the same then as now — would be among the people he'd consult on transportation issues.

Cayetano voiced the frustrations of many rail skeptics who backed Carlisle, saying, "Like many who supported you back then, I knew you favored rail but I asked and you promised to consider seriously all sides of the rail issue — and if you decided to go ahead with rail, then to do it right. That was all that was asked of you."

That was before the new mayor decided it was more politically profitable to hop aboard the gravy train than ask questions.

Instead of bringing in fresh faces who could change the hostile tone of the debate and give credible assurances that rail was being done on the up and up, Carlisle kept on former Mayor Mufi Hannemann's team, which had been accused of heavy-handed management.

Rather than do his own due diligence on the most expensive public works project in Hawaii's history, Carlisle lazily mouthed Hannemann's old lines as his own.

Among his first acts was a trip to Washington, D.C., to assure federal transit officials that nothing had changed — and to assure rich campaign donors associated with rail that the checks they had been sending Hannemann could be made out to him.

Now he's earning his keep by punk-talking honest citizens who ask fair questions.

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