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ISLAND VOICES

Invest unspent APEC funds into reading



Jed Gaines is founder and president of Read Aloud America.

By Jed Gaines

In reading the article "State costs for safety come in low" (Star-Advertiser, Nov. 24), I was pleasantly surprised to see that only \$3.2 million was spent on security at the recent Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meetings, which was less than half of the \$7.5 million budgeted.

I would like to recommend that the savings be reallocated to some of the proven 41 local nonprofits who lost their funding in February 2011 as a result of the Department of Human Services' need to "keep intact job training and welfare programs." The cancellation of the contract with DHS resulted in a loss of 95 percent of funding for the Read Aloud America (RAP) Program.

For the past 12 years this Hawaii-based nonprofit has reached over a quarter of a million adults and children statewide with our mission of promoting literacy, bonding families and building communities of lifetime readers.

Due to the drastic budget cuts last spring, we were forced to reduce this

fall semester 2011 programming from 12 schools on four islands to four schools on two islands — but even these four schools drew a cumulative attendance of almost 10,000. The RAA program reaches out to school communities like no other. In your publication's Aug. 31 editorial ("Give kids reading help they need," Our View), you quoted me: "In the process of fostering good readers, such programs as RAA are instilling values and creating good citizens, civic-minded citizens." I implore the governor and the Legislature to keep in mind that future generations need your support now. It seems obvious that the funding can be found.

The Star-Advertiser's front-page story on Nov. 27 discusses the importance of preschool education ("Isle preschool enrollment shrinks"). As I have presented at the RAA programs, reaching and connecting with parents and guardians needs to be the No. 1 priority, and this has to happen during the first five years of a child's life.

Programs like Good Be-

ginnings Alliance, which begin before a child even enters school, are important. However, we have to reach parents on a more massive scale. At RAP, families are spending more time together and reading more at home, going to libraries, and talking story at the dinner table with the electronic media turned off. Until we tackle family issues, attitudes and values will not change for the better in the home.

RAA programs reach more parents than any other program in the public schools. Any principal who has experienced the benefits of our program will tell you that RAA brings more parents and children into their cafeterias more than all others. Why? Because it is fun, and families enjoy their time together hearing great stories read to them by our volunteer readers. They return to their homes with a new outlook on positive parenting.

Now is the time to "Bring RAP Back" by taking that APEC surplus and providing funds to a program that changes the attitudes and values of the parents of our future generations.

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insight