

SHIRLENE DELACRUZ OSTROV

The Hawaii Republican Party's new head sees strength in core beliefs as well as diversity

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By Maureen O'Connell

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When Shirlene Delacruz Ostrov, the newly elected chairwoman of the Hawaii Republican Party, started college, she had no interest in politics. "I was all about mathematics and, in fact, selected it as my minor as I thought about engineering or some other STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) degree," Ostrov said. But world events unfolding in the late 1980s and early '90s, during her undergraduate years, soon prompted a



political science major. The Berlin Wall fell, the Soviet Union collapsed, Iraq invaded Kuwait, students led pro-democracy protests in China's Tiananmen Square, and South Africa overturned decades of apartheid. "I was at the University of Florida, watching profound change," she said. "I wanted to understand what was happening in the world around me and before I knew it ... my academic curiosities shot toward politics."

Ostrov, who grew up in Mililani, went on to a career in the Air Force. Now a retired colonel, she notes tours in command and in the State Department as highlights. "I led thousands in the 376th Expeditionary Mission Support Group, projecting American and allied combat air power throughout Central Asia," she said. "There I had a chance to showcase the base as a hub for strategic airlift operations and transiting personnel and equipment supporting operations in Afghanistan." These days, Ostrov owns Ares Mobility Solutions, a logistics consulting company. Work trips take her to Washington, D.C., where business partners are based, and she lives in Mililani with her husband and twin daughters. Her sole bid for political office came in 2016 when she ran unsuccessfully against Colleen Hanabusa to fill the U.S. House seat vacated by the late Mark Takai. Succeeding outgoing GOP state chairman Fritz Rohlfing, Ostrov is tasked with guiding a party operating at a severe disadvantage in the Hawaii Legislature, with just five House Republicans and zero representation in the Senate. Reflecting on how her career in the military informs her post, Ostrov said:

"Every experience I've had taught me some valuable lessons. But the thread that I kept seeing, over and over again, was the need for diverse people to work toward a common goal. Whether I agreed with them or not, when it came time to get the mission done, we all pulled together. I know that's how the Republican Party of Hawaii will enjoy its future success, as we listen to the people of our state and begin pulling together to implement the best ideas."

Question: How would you describe the Hawaii GOP?

Answer: The party is full of energy, especially after the last election. President Trump motivated voters to come out in force and his momentum paid off big time for the Republican Party of Hawaii. Our ranks of registered Republicans swelled by 40 percent, which was just amazing. Clearly, voters are looking for an alternative to the status quo. I want to seize the moment and run hard. My team is diverse — we are almost all women and minorities — and we're proudly conservative. That's our binding element, what will keep us focused. Even as we have a variety of opinions, we realize that is the true strength of our party, offering a way for differing viewpoints to find common ground. When we do that, we build the party and advance the concerns and solutions the people of Hawaii, which they so desperately need right now. Yes, we have some who want to lower taxes, others who want to shrink the size and scope of government, vigorous Second Amendment defenders and more. We have even attracted non-traditional Republicans, like those who may be considered more socially liberal.

In the coming months, we'll bring all those perspectives and voices into a single room and build on our current platform. ... I know that those core conservative principles — keeping government lean and effective, keeping our taxes as low as possible and pushing for every family to be able to make and manifest the best decisions for their future — will not only shape the discussion but bring a much-needed contrast to lawmakers in Honolulu. The Democrats, if they are to remain the majority party, must be more accountable to the people; they have been too long a monolithic machine dominating our state's policies.

Q: A lot of women among the Hawaii GOP's new leadership is particularly noticeable given Donald Trump's controversies on the campaign trail and in the White House. Does this reflect any trend or policy messaging?

A: The only trend is that concerned voters, like myself, are so disappointed in the way ahead for our state they could no longer sit and watch one side dominate.

I'm new to politics, so are many of the people serving the party today. We have not been deeply engaged in state politics formally, but we are so tired of the same old, same old in the Capitol. To help us understand the processes and procedures, we have our wise counsel in Pat Saiki (a former member of Hawaii's congressional delegation), who will keep us informed on how the party has worked historically. Then we have a host of young — in both politics and birthdays — lions who will bring energy and passion to the party, a definite plus we cannot overlook. We're making a statement against the policies that are beginning to cripple our state. We're sending a message that whoever is in charge needs a strong, loyal opposition that will hold them accountable and offer the voters a choice. That choice cannot be token, but must be based on great ideas that capture the spirit of the people of our state and present attractive alternatives in policy.

The two go hand-in-hand, the majority party must always hear the breath of the opposition on their heels, which should sharpen their decision-making while bringing them in from the far-left of the spectrum, where too many of their policies originate.

While President Trump's words are his to manage, the message from the Republican Party of Hawaii cannot be any clearer: We're here to support the people of our state, give them a voice in a system that all but ignores a large portion of their concerns, and offer clear, simple alternatives to disastrous policies.

Q: You have said the Hawaii GOP members want to "build their business, family and community without excessive government interference." Is there a particular interference you'll push to eliminate?

A: Absolutely. Our government is about to levy another permanent tax to support this seeming black hole also known as the rail. So far, we've seen little accountability, responsibility or innovation in getting this back on track. And that kind of thinking is beginning to pervade the Capitol. When ideas are low, the majority just believes they can put the problem on the backs of the taxpayers without understanding the dire consequences of that levy. We might be in a different position if they were offering some relief. For instance, if they worked with our congressional delegation to amend the Jones Act to exempt Hawaii, they could reap a potential savings of up to \$80 every week for a family of four. Instead, we see them add more complex additions to the tax code, yet cutting services that all people use. These kinds of decisions, saving short-term pennies but spending long-term dollars, will lead us to a situation reminiscent of our fellow island brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico.

Those hardworking men and women didn't ask for a messy fiscal situation. They worked hard as teachers, sanitation workers and auto technicians and more, yet their island is in the midst of a major crisis. All of that was completely avoidable if the people had representatives that understood their needs and made decisions based on fiscal responsibility and concern for every tax dollar collected by the government.

When we put everything on the backs of citizens, we increase their workload without giving them any relief. And they should be the last resort, we should never just raise taxes without exhausting every possible way to solve our problems before we ask a penny from them. That, by itself, would remove excessive interference.

Q: Back in June, when you were a candidate for Hawaii's 1st Congressional District seat, you said you fully supported then-presumptive presidential nominee Trump. Is that still the case?

A: I do. He's my president, and he's the leader of the Republican Party. Many of the things we're reading about need to be fully vetted before any of us can make an informed decision. ... The people elected him and I stand by his administration. While people will read the news and make up their own minds, my goal is to be laser-focused on the issues in this state.

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