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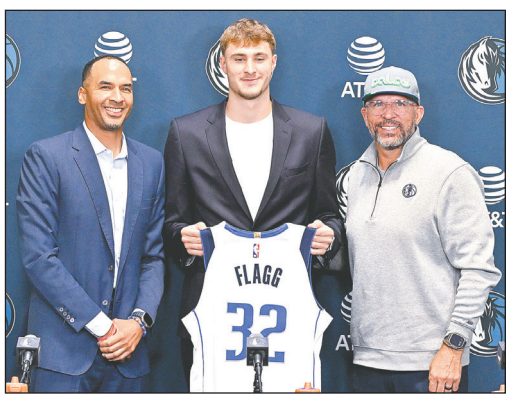

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Hawaii Tribune Herald
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'Confusion, fear, anxiety'

Trump administration's actions rattle foreign students at UH Hilo

By KYVELI DIENER
Hawaii Tribune-Herald

International students at the University of Hawaii at Hilo are grappling with anxiety about their visas, travel and social media as the university braces for a potential loss of enrollment because of those concerns.

"During the first Trump administration, there was a sense among international students that they were not as welcome in the U.S. as they previously had been, but I think that sentiment was not nearly as widespread as it is now," said Jim Mellon, director of International Student Services and Intercultural Education at UH Hilo.

MELLON

IRWIN

The revocation of student visas from students participating in pro-Gaza protests in March escalated to what Mellon said was "thousands of student visas (being) revoked by the U.S. government in April, and subsequently reinstated after legal challenges."

The president then tousled with Harvard University over international students in May, which resulted in the targeting of Chinese students here on visas. Later that month, the State Department paused scheduling any new visa application appointments for foreign students.

"Government policies have been rolled out in an abrupt and disruptive manner the past several months," Mellon said. "Cascading

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PRIDE DAY CELEBRATION

TIM WRIGHT/Special to the Tribune-Herald

There was no shortage of color or enthusiasm Saturday as Pride Day parade participants strutted through downtown Hilo, waving flags and rocking rainbow gear during the vibrant celebration. For more Pride Day parade photos, see Being There in Monday's edition.

Senate takes up Trump's policy bill

By CATIE EDMONDSON, BRAD PLUMER, ANDREW DUEHREN and MARGOT SANGER-KATZ
NYTimes News Service

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Saturday narrowly voted to begin debate on the sprawling domestic policy package carrying President Donald Trump's agenda, clearing a key procedural hurdle after Republican leaders cut a series of deals with holdouts in hopes of winning the votes to pass it.

TRUMP

The vote to take up the bill was 51-49, after party leaders held the vote open for more than three hours in a suspenseful scene while they haggled with holdouts, both

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Issue No. 180
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A big boost for agriculture in Hawaii

Governor Green signs bills aimed at protecting farmers and bolstering food security

By JOHN BURNETT
Hawaii Tribune-Herald

Editor's note: This story originally appeared Saturday in the Tribune-Herald's digital edition.

A pilot program to fight agriculture-related crimes in Hawaii will go into effect July 1 on the Big Island and Oahu.

The program within the state Department of Law Enforcement is intended to strengthen laws relating to agriculture theft — including cattle rustling — plus trespassing and hunting without permission on private ag land.

RICHARDS

KAHALOA

The new law — one of five ag measures signed into law today by Gov. Josh Green — is being called "Duke's law." It was Senate Bill 1249, which was introduced by Sen. Tim Richards, a Waimea Democrat and vice chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Environment Committee.

The law's name is in honor of Cranston "Duke" Pia, a 39-year-old Makaha, Oahu, rancher who was — in Richards' words — "executed in front of his mother" for protecting his cattle from hunting dogs on Feb. 17, 2024.

Pia died of a single gunshot wound to the head.

Chantston Pila Kekawa, then 17, of

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NEWS

Trump victorious again as US Supreme Court wraps up its term

By JAN WOLFE
Reuters

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court on the last day of rulings for its current term gave Donald Trump his latest in a series of victories at the nation's top judicial body, one that may make it easier for him to implement contentious elements of his sweeping agenda as he tests the limits of presidential power.

With its six conservative members in the majority and its three liberals dissenting, the court on Friday curbed the ability of judges to impede his policies nationwide, resetting the power balance between the federal judiciary and presidents.

The ruling came after the Republican president's administration asked the Supreme Court to narrow the scope of so-called "universal" injunctions issued by three federal judges that halted nationally the enforcement of his January executive order limiting birthright citizenship.

The court's decision has "systematically weakened judicial oversight and strengthened executive discretion," said Paul Rosenzweig, an attorney who served in Republican President George W. Bush's administration.

Friday's ruling said that judges generally can grant relief only to the individuals or groups who brought a particular lawsuit.

The decision did not, however, permit immediate implementation of Trump's directive, instead instructing lower courts to reconsider the scope of the injunctions. The ruling was authored by Justice Amy Coney Barrett, one of three conservative justices who Trump appointed during his first term in office from 2017-2021.

Trump has scored a series of victories at the Supreme Court since returning to office in January. These have included clearing the way for his administration to resume deporting migrants to countries other than their own without offering them a chance to show the harms they could face and ending temporary legal status held by hundreds of thousands of migrants on humanitarian grounds.

The court also permitted implementation of Trump's ban on transgender people in the military, let his administration withhold payment to foreign aid groups for work already performed for the government, allowed his firing of two Democratic members of federal labor boards to stand for now, and backed his Department of Government Efficiency in two disputes.

STUDENTS From the front page

policy actions and decisions against colleges — including the singling out of international students — is much more widespread and prevalent now. The stakes seem to be much higher this time."

UH Hilo had 227 international students from 33 countries enrolled for the fall 2024 semester.

Though UH Hilo does not currently have any foreign students at risk of losing their visas, Mellon said he has witnessed "a wide range of feelings that students have expressed over the past several months, including confusion, fear, anxiety and discontent."

Mellon spoke about one South American student who received a bachelor's degree in 2022 and master's degree in 2024 at UH Hilo. That students was offered a fellowship to get their doctorate at Princeton University starting this fall, but it was rescinded in a move Mellon believes to be connected to federal cuts to scientific research.

The South American student was too nervous about government surveillance to comment to the Tribune-Herald and asked not to be identified.

Some international students also have been afraid to travel between Hilo and their home countries. Mellon said one student from Mexico who just finished their first year at UH Hilo is afraid to travel home this summer.

The Mexican student declined to comment to the Tribune-Herald or be identified in order to protect themselves.

Annie Haglund, 24, of Sweden received her bachelor's degree in December after moving to Hilo four years ago to join the Vulcans soccer team.

She was nervous to speak about her feelings following the government's announced intentions to monitor the social media of international students.

The detention of young female travelers at the airport in Honolulu — including two German tourists who did not have lodging booked prior to arrival — has made her worried about not only visiting her home country but even taking interisland flights with friends.

Haglund currently is employed with Hilo Fish Co. on a visa that permits employment for students who found work after completing their studies on an F-1 visa. She requested an interview waiver, a common practice that would allow her to renew her visa by sending documents to her embassy directly without a new interview being needed with U.S. agents.

KYVELI DIENER/Tribune-Herald

Recent UH Hilo graduate Annie Haglund's visa renewal that would allow her to continue living and working in Hilo was placed on sudden hold due to the political turmoil over immigration, leaving the Swedish national anxious.

Then, just as Haglund was planning her annual summer visit to Sweden, her embassy informed her it was forced to pause everything related to visas, including waiver request decisions. The unexpected turn has forced Haglund to rethink the trip, where she had planned to not only renew the visa with her embassy but also attend the funeral of a recently deceased uncle.

"I thought I had it all figured out, then I got the email," Haglund said. The late night notice immediately brought her to tears, she said.

Mellon said the current political climate is "instilling doubt and uncertainty … that is discouraging for prospective international students."

"Other countries are capitalizing on the current political landscape in the U.S. and developing 'brain gain' schemes to attract international students and scholars," Mellon said. "They will likely reap the benefits."

Mellon said international students also have a positive impact to the local economy that could be lost with reduced enrollment. He cited a 2024 study from the National Association for International Educators that found international students at UH Hilo contributed $3.7 million to the local economy and supported 34 jobs.

Fortunately for the fall 2025 semester, Mellon said "it appears that quite a few new students have either already obtained their visa or scheduled their visa interview," and several students transferring from other U.S. colleges will have already obtained their visa.

He remains worried, however, that as international students continue being admitted, "they will likely face serious obstacles to getting a visa in time for the fall semester."

UH Hilo Chancellor Bonnie Irwin said the university "will continue to support all of our students to the best of our ability," including directing international students to campus and system resources.

Irwin added that she is "grateful" that the UH system is facing such challenges in a unified manner across all 10 campus to provide students with support.

"We have been fortunate at UH Hilo, as none of our students have been targeted," Irwin said. "The decisions being made in Washington have certainly presented challenges to everyone in higher education, but we remain focused on our mission of providing a quality education for Hawaii Island students as well as others who choose to study at UH Hilo."

Email Kyveli Diener at kdiener@hawaiitribune-herald.com.

BILLS From the front page

Maili, Oahu, was charged as an adult with second-degree murder, first-degree terroristic threatening, firearms offenses and first-degree theft. He pleaded not guilty and has a trial scheduled for Aug. 18 in Honolulu Circuit Court.

"SB 1249 is about protecting our farmers and ranchers while honoring the memory of Duke Pia," Richards said today. "Duke was a young rancher who was tragically shot and killed while confronting trespassers on his land.

"This law strengthens enforcement, increases penalties, and gives us the tools to fight rural crime. It's about justice, safety and preserving the future of agriculture in Hawaii."

The law funds, within DLE, a full-time assistant chief position; two full-time investigator positions, one on the Big Island, the other on Oahu; and six full-time agricultural patrol officers, three for the Big Island and three for Oahu.

The new law doesn't contain the stand-your-ground component that would allow a farmer or rancher, under certain circumstances, to exercise deadly force without retreating that was in another bill Richards introduced. That bill, HB 1248, the original Duke Pia bill, died without a hearing from the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The new law appropriates $949,856 for each of the next two fiscal years to fund the pilot program.

Other agriculture and food-related bills signed into law today by Green include:

— HB 534, which prohibits the sale of any raw processed ahi tuna by retail establishments without a label that states the country where the ahi was landed.

The bill claims that the majority of raw processed ahi sold in Hawaii retail establishments as poke is "foreign-sourced, previously frozen, gas treated and imported in pre-cut cubes" and generally cheaper for retailers.

It also states that local consumers of poke are "subjected to misleading advertisements and in-store terminology such as 'prepared fresh,' 'freshly made' and 'locally made,' while the ahi used to prepare the poke is foreign-sourced, previously frozen, gas treated and imported in pre-cut cubes."

"Due to a loophole in federal labeling laws, retailers are not required to disclose the origin of these products, leading many consumers to falsely assume they are purchasing fresh, locally caught tuna," wrote Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa, a Kona Democrat, the majority caucus leader and former Agriculture and Food Systems chairwoman, in a committee report. "By ensuring transparency in seafood labeling, this measure empowers consumers to make informed choices, supports Hawaii's fishing industry, and protects the integrity of the state's premium seafood market."

The law, which goes into effect July 1, 2026, was introduced by Rep. Tyson Miyake, a Maui Democrat and majority whip, with Kahaloa and fellow Big Island Reps. Nicole Lowen and David Tarnas signing on as co-sponsors.

According to Eric Kingma, executive director of the Hawaii Longline Association, the local market for fresh ahi poke sold at retail largely has been replaced by foreign-caught, gas-treated tuna imported from Vietnam, the Philippines, China, Indonesia and other countries. He added the new law "should help Hawaii's commercial tuna fishermen statewide."

"This bill will hopefully drive consumer demand for more fresh Hawaii-landed ahi poke at retail because they will see that the previously frozen, gas-treated tuna is not from Hawaii," Kingma said.

— HB 774, which which goes into effect July 1, relates to value-added products and establishes a food and product innovation network within the Agribusiness Development Corporation. It also appropriates $385,289 for each of the next two fiscal years for two full-time positions, plus operating expenses.

The development of this network is intended to facilitate the responsible use of labels such as "Hawaii made," "Made in Hawaii," "Produced in Hawaii" and "Processed in Hawaii," and aid businesses in promoting their products locally and internationally.

Kahaloa, who introduced the legislation, called it "transformative for Hawaii's farmers and food entrepreneurs — empowering them to innovate, grow and proudly share their unique products with the world."

Green said the network will provide "access to facilities, equipment, certification resources — things that make a difference."

"Honestly, I believe people are more than ready to buy agricultural products from the state of Hawaii," Green said.

— HB 496 prohibits certain words and images on packaging of mamaki tea suggesting the tea is a Hawaii agricultural product unless 100% of the tea or dried leaves were cultivated, harvested and dried in Hawaii. The law, which goes into effect July 1, also appropriates $65,000 for each of the next two fiscal years for a full-time measurement standards inspector.

The bill was introduced by Kahaloa, with fellow Big Island Reps. Lowen, Jeanne Kapela and Sue Keohokapu-Lee Loy among the co-signers.

The measure was formerly on Green's intent to veto list.

— and HB 427 renames the state Department of Agriculture the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, and the Board of Agriculture the Board of Agriculture and Biosecurity. The legislation, introduced by Kahaloa, also transfers the Hawaii Invasive Species Council from the Department of Land and Natural Resources to the newly named department.

In addition, the measure establishes a position of deputy chair for biosecurity to oversee all biosecurity initiatives within the department.

The department, with the governor's approval, may declare a biosecurity emergency in response to an outbreak of a pest or resistant organism that poses an economic or environmental threat.

According to the governor's office, the state budget allocates the highest level of funding ever for biosecurity — $26.6 million appropriated over the next two fiscal years to support positions and related expenses.

"With the increasing frequency of natural disasters and growing biosecurity threats, safeguarding our resources and environment is a top priority for my administration," said Green. "Prevention and forethought will fortify our state, and by signing HB 427, we are keeping top of mind the ways in which we can stay in the driver's seat — actively leading the effort to protect our agriculture and our islands."

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