June 14, 2020

Mr. David Black, owner, Black Press Ltd.

Mr. Dennis Francis, publisher, Honolulu Star-Advertiser

Dear Mr. Black and Mr. Francis,

As former governors, we know how much democracy depends on a free press. The Honolulu Star-Advertiser provides the most comprehensive coverage of our state. It knits our community together, giving us vital news on government, business, health care, education, culture and life in our islands.

During this pandemic, information can be a lifeline. Your journalists have helped our citizens navigate a fast-changing reality. They have tracked the spread of COVID-19 and the explosion in unemployment claims. They have given voice to people waiting in long lines for food as well as small businesses trying to stay afloat. They have shared tips on how to cope and they have lifted our spirits with stories of selfless caring and kokua.

So we were dismayed to hear that the newspaper's management sent layoff notices to roughly half of the newsroom staff represented by the Pacific Media Workers Guild. Such a drastic reduction could doom the newspaper. The 31 journalists on the chopping block include photographers, the entire graphic arts department and veteran journalists covering health care, homelessness and investigative reporting, plus columnists such as Kokua Line.

Given the dramatic drop in advertising revenue, Star-Advertiser journalists are ready to do their part to keep the newspaper solvent. Their hours have already been cut 20%. They have offered to take extensive furloughs, which are far less damaging and disruptive than layoffs and still meet the need for cost savings. Please support them so that Honolulu's only daily newspaper can weather this economic crisis and come back strong. We cannot afford to lose it.

Sincerely,

Gov. Neil Abercrombie Gov. Ben Cayetano Gov. John Waihee