LONGstorySHORT
with LESLIE WILCOX

PBS Hawaii

**GUEST: GEORGE ARIYOSHI: SHAPING THE FUTURE**
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And it's not only what you do, but it's how you do things, and how you inspire and get other people involved. And I think that feeling became very strong in Hawaii during my time. And that became, I think, my political strength.

**He campaigned as quiet, but effective; and though he hadn't envisioned a career in politics, George Ariyoshi never lost an election. Hawaii's longest-serving Governor reflects on the legacy of his thirteen years in high office, and what he's been doing in the quarter century since he retired from government service. That's next, on Long Story Short.**

Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox is Hawaii's first weekly television program produced and broadcast in high definition.

***Aloha mai kakou*, and welcome to Long Story Short. I'm Leslie Wilcox. George Ariyoshi was the youngest Democrat elected to Hawaii's Territorial Legislature in the Democratic Revolution of 1954, and twenty years later, he would become the first Governor in America who was not White. The son of Japanese immigrants, Ariyoshi attended McKinley High School during World War II, served in the Military Intelligence Service after the war, and graduated from the University of Michigan Law School. He was building his law practice when he met Democratic Party leader and future Governor John Burns, who encouraged him to run for office in '54. Five years later, as a member of the State Senate in the first year of statehood, Ariyoshi was navigating the tricky path of pursuing his legislative goals while playing the high stakes game of politics. When Republican Governor William Quinn nominated Republican Samuel P. King to become a judge, Ariyoshi faced a conflict between his personal convictions and party loyalty.**

The Republicans controlled the Senate during the time I was there. Sam King's name came down for confirmation, and we had, at that time, fourteen Republicans and eleven Democrats. But Sam King didn't have two Republicans, so he only had twelve Republican votes. And our Democrats got together and said, If you can hold firm on this, we can defeat the nomination. And I listened to all of that, and I finally said, Wait now; why? What kind of judge would he make? They said, Oh, he would be a very fine judge, but that's not

the question. I said, But it is. We're talking about confirmation of a judge. And they told me that, oh, they have a chance to embarrass the administration. Now, this is political, they say. And I listened to that and I said, Wait, I want to say something now. You remember in 1954 when you got started, that's only four or five years ago. I got involved because I wanted fairness in this community. I wanted everybody to be treated fairly, advance on the basis of their ability. You're telling me he's gonna make a fine judge; why are we gonna hold back? And I told them that it was important that in order to be fair, you gotta be fair not just to your friends. You gotta be fair to those who may not be your friends, and that's the measure of your fairness. And they told me that they couldn't see it that way, and we had to go out and be together as a group. And I told them, Sorry, I'm going out there, and I'm gonna publicly say that I'm gonna support Sam King. I called him, and he was so overjoyed. He told me, Oh, now that's the vote I need to get confirmed, and I can sleep well tonight.

**And that's what happened.**

Yes.

**And yet, when you were Governor, I don't know how many times you heard this expression, The Machine. The Democratic Machine under Governor Ariyoshi, controlling people. I mean, it didn't sound like George would stand up alone. How did you feel about that, and was there any truth to it?**

No. There was no truth to it, because I was very open. You take, for example, the State plans. I didn't want it to be my plan, and I wanted to involved people, and I worked together with so many people on every functional plan and let it become their plan. I think it's an indication of my willingness to look at things that are happening in the community and involve people. The Super Ferry is one of those things that I became very concerned about, because they were trying to shortcut the process. And I think that the people who were in power at that time were willing to take those shortcuts. But I think if we had gone through the process, and everybody talk about oh, how important it is and why we need to get this, there would have been greater support and understanding of the need for a ferry, and as a result, make it happen. I think it's true in our planning effort. Every functional plan, I had between two hundred to four hundred people involved. And they were happy to be involved, because now, they could talk about and participate in how they wanted to see things happen in our community. So they all went to the Legislature. I never had to lobby. They went to the Legislature and said, This is not Ariyoshi's plan, this is our plan, it's our ideas, it's what we think is important and necessary to get where we want to be. And I tried to select people based upon their differences. Different communities they come from, different occupational backgrounds, different cultural backgrounds. And I used to take part in the swearing-in ceremonies and tell them that, You are serving on a board and you'll find a great deal of diversity, and this is by design. Because we don't believe that it should be controlled by one or two individuals and move different directions. Everybody should participate, and everybody should have a voice in what happens. And my

feeling was, you put them all on the table, and then you have a chance to select the best of ideas, rather than one person indicating the direction that it has to go. That was my whole process. Everything that I did when I was Governor fell along that line. When I had my budget problems at the very beginning, finance, I called the unions, I called the public employees.

**And this turned out to be the first economic recession since statehood.**

That's right. And I called them together, and I told them that I didn't want to fire anybody, I didn't want to make pay cuts, and I've thought about a way to do that, but I need help. And I explained to them that I was not gonna fill positions that became vacant, and that I wanted, however, those who remain to pick up what had been done before. So I told them with five people working now, and one position becomes vacant, I want the four to do not what four were doing, I want the four to do what five were doing. And I felt that I had a very heavy burden, beyond that which would be faced by an average Governor, just wanting to do the best for the community. You see, when I became Governor in 1974, it was fifteen years after Hawaii had become a state. And I wanted to know what happened during that fifteen-year period, so I looked at it very carefully. And one of the things that really struck me was the population growth, where we had grown about twenty percent a year, national rate about eight-tenths of one percent, so we were growing three times as fast as the population growth elsewhere. And I became very concerned about the need for us to think about Hawaii, what kind of place we're going to be, how do we get there, what kind of things must we be concerned about in order for us to get off in the wrong kind of direction. I had about seven young people who were in my office when I was Governor who handled the key functions of my office. And some of them were still at the University. And I learned also about their commitment, about wanting to live in the community, and I felt very strongly about what they wanted to do. Not just in the political arena, but they can become anything they want, but they don't forget that there is a commitment to the community. And that has been a very important part of my life now. I put together a booklet, Hawaii's 50th Anniversary. And I talked about fifty years of Hawaii's statehood, but I especially spent time talking about the next fifty years. And I did that to challenge the young people in our community, and I had one of those pamphlets was given to every high school senior. And I was invited many, many times to go to high schools to speak to them, and every time I went, I came away feeling so good about our young people. I found them very concerned about the future. They started talking about jobs, they talked about the economy, about housing. I learned a lot from young people, and they've played a very important role in shaping my life. And it's not only what you do, but it's how you do things and how you inspire and get other people involved. And I think that feeling became very strong in Hawaii during my time, and that became, I think, my political strength. My campaign manager was Bob Oshiro. And after my first election, I had to sit with him, I had

to tell him why I'm going to run for office again, why I'm going up for reelection, what have I done and what are my plans, what's my vision for the future.
**He made you apply for the job all over again with him.**
That's right. Uh-huh. And he was a very good campaign manager, but he was also a real visionary.

**Family, friends, and colleagues influenced George Ariyoshi's political approach over the years, but none more than his mentor, John Burns. In 1970, Burns convinced Ariyoshi to be his running mate when he ran for his third term as Governor. They won that election, and when Burns became too ill to serve in late 1973, Lieutenant Governor Ariyoshi stepped into the Governor's job. The following year, he won his first of three elections for Hawaii's Chief Executive. By then, Burns had helped instill in Ariyoshi the confidence to stand firm for his beliefs, while bridging differences and building consensus to overcome opposition.**

Well, I think Jack Burns played a very significant role in the development of my idea and my style. But Burns' feeling that the situation was changing, that he represented the older people in the community, but he felt the young people in the community might have a different point of view. So when I got elected, he told me that, You and I are different people. I'm Caucasian, you're Japanese. I was born in Montana, you were born in Hawaii. You went to school here, I went to school elsewhere. And I was an Army brat, and I traveled wherever my parents went, but you have roots here in Hawaii, and as a result, your thinking has got to be different from mine. And please feel free to do what you feel you have to do, say what you have to say, and if you disagree with me, and you have to disagree, that's okay with me too. I really appreciated that part about Jack Burns, when he told me that. For example, in 1976, the State Health Department was having a great deal of problems with the plantations. The sugar plantations were taking bagasse—that's the sugarcane waste, and they just bulldozed it into the ocean. And the EPA and the State Health Department wanted them to stop that. And the plantation people said—C. Brewer, We're willing to stop, and we're gonna take that and instead of bulldozing, we're gonna burn that, and we're gonna generate electricity. But it's gonna take us seventeen months to create that. The Health Department said, No, we'll give you six months, only. So they came to me, and I talked to Governor Burns about it. He told me, What do you think? I said, They're gonna stop bulldozing in seventeen months, but they can't stop now. They're gonna create a system that's gonna be taking care, and they're gonna create one-third of the electricity used on the Island of Hawaii when they finish this, and I think it's a good thing for them to do that. You're willing to suffer the consequences? Yup. So, I did that. And then, one of the Attorney Generals assigned to the Health Department went to the EPA when they were having a meeting, and they complained about George Ariyoshi caved in to the sugar plantation groups and

went along with keeping this pollution going. And I went to the meeting, and I told them what was happening, why we're doing this. And they kinda went along with me. And when I saw Governor Burns after that, he told me, I just wanted you to witness and feel what was gonna happen. He said, I knew this was going to happen, and you were going to be criticized, but I just wanted you to go through the experience of doing this. And he told me, I knew you were gonna stand up for it and be able to work it out.

**What's the toughest thing you've ever been through professionally, and also the biggest personal challenge you've had in your life?**

I think that when I was faced with the Maryland land law, and that's the law that would have given options to purchase leaseholders, future leaseholders, but would not have existing leaseholders. And I was for land reform, I wanted the options, the right to purchase, but I didn't want it to hurt people in the process. I had the unions come sit before me and tell me that if I didn't go along, they were gonna be taking it up with me. I was chairman of the Ways and Means Committee at the time, and I was told that if I didn't go along, I would lose my chairmanship. And I took that as an opportunity to tell people, you have a point of view, I respect you for that. I'm not telling you I'm right and you're wrong, but you've got to respect my right or the right of any person who feels very strongly that something is there and they have to vote in a certain kind of way. And I think that was a very difficult period for me, but it was a very enlightening period because people began to understand that that's what we had to do. We had to stand up for what we believed to be right, and be unafraid to take that position. I had more people tell me, We were against you because we didn't understand the bill, but in fact, the leaseholderstelling me, You protected us. And then, there were those who came to me and told me that, We disagree with you, but we admire your willingness to come to us and talk about it. And the other very important principle, which is very applicable today, the party platform; and there were some who were saying to me, Well, this is a party platform, land reform, and you gotta go along with it. And my feeling was, the party platform is very vague. We have all kinds of feelings of people, different point of views in the party, and that we cannot expect every person to do everything that the party platform says. We gotta make leeway, allowances for people to have differences.

**So, may I ask you; what was your most daunting personal challenge?**

See, I made a decision before I left the office that I was not gonna do anything that affected the work that I did as Governor. In other words, any State policy, I was not going to get involved in for compensation. And I have stuck to that policy. When they first asked me, talked to me when I was Governor, one of the really big things that was available was to become trustee of Bishop Estate. And very early, I took the position, I appointed those people who are gonna make the judgment, and I will not go to them and ask them to have them do something for me. So I stayed away from that. And I was asked the day before I left the office what my policy were, whether it's changed or not, because I was

leaving the office. I said, No, same thing, same reasons apply. I went one step further. I told them, if the position were offered to me, I would decline to accept it. And I think drawing those very clear demarcations between the kind of things that I wanted to get involved in and the kinds that I did not want to get involved in, to me, became very important.

**What is that like? I mean, everyone's been criticized by somebody, but very few people get criticized at the level a Governor gets criticized by with a statewide audience watching, and thinking, and expressing opinions. What's it like living with that?**

I felt every person has their own point of view. No matter what you try to do, it's not gonna be the same way it's gonna apply to every person. A person in Waialae Kahala may be impacted in a different kinda way than a person in Waianae. I understood that, so I felt people had a right to say what they wanted to do about the policies. I embraced the differences, and I brought them in, and I told them, Eh, tell us more about why what we're doing is not the right thing.

**But you hear a lot of personal stuff too. How's that?**

Yeah. It's just part of the game. I accepted that, and I was not too concerned.

**He left office more than a quarter century ago, and George Ariyoshi does not live in the past. In fact, he's consumed with thinking about Hawaii's future, preserving our natural resources and cultural heritage, and developing our economy for coming generations.**

I think we need to look at diversifying our economy, and people are trying to do that now. But I think maybe there has to be someone who can kind of point out what kind of things are necessary to be considered in order to get there. And to me, in the health field, Hawaii can become a real leader in so many things in the health field and the technology that comes along with making that possible. And then, I think we need to have the University become very much involved in developing some of the technology. For example, the person who wants to start something here, they don't know what to start. But shouldn't the University be able to point out what areas are very vital areas in which they can become very successful? And all that brain power at the University, I think we need to let them know that we appreciate those kind of things that they can do to help make the economy's future, Hawaii's future, but they also have the right to participate in the successes that come from that. And in the past, I think we've had kind of a feeling that, Oh, people at the University get paid by us, all R & D belongs to us and that they should not benefit from that. I think the benefit becomes a two-way street. I was very strongly for aerospace because in Hawaii, we're looking for technology, and this aerospace is going to be something that's gonna be very big and important. But Hawaii must not lose the opportunity to get involved and be at Barking Sands on Kauai, we have a telescope that nobody else has, we have astronauts that trained on Hawaii

where no other state can say that. The private sector coming to me and talking to me about, oh, how they can be involved in this process. So, I have gone to the Legislature, I've gone to the government, and to try to get them informed about what the process is. When we first started that, very few people understood, but today, the greatest supporters of aerospace are those in the Legislature. But I didn't do that because of compensation. I did it because of my very strong feelings about Hawaii. I'm very much against, for example, they're selling the property out in Haleiwa that are part of park lands, three acres or so.

**Right.**

That they can't develop. And this should remain a part of it, they should not sell that kind of property. That property does not belong to us now, once they sell and use the monies. It's there for the people and the future of Hawaii.

**One of George Ariyoshi's priorities since his years as Governor has been the East West Center, and in 2012, the Center honored him with its prestigious Asia Pacific Community Building Award. The Center was proposed in 1959 by John Burns, who was then Hawaii's Territorial Delegate to Congress, and by then U.S. Senator Lyndon Johnson. In 1975, Governor Ariyoshi advanced and ultimately signed a law that gave the East West Center autonomy from the University of Hawaii. First, though, he had to persuade the U.S. State Department.**

And at first, it was very difficult for them to understand that, and they thought I was accusing them of being very biased in how the Center was operating. I told them, No, I'm not expressing that bias; what I'm saying is that I want the perception of control becoming eliminated also. And when we talked about it, they finally agreed. I told them, I want it incorporated with the Hawaii laws. And that's what they agreed to. And then, I wanted the board of directors to be appointed, five by the State Department, five by the Governor, but I wanted five independent people appointed by the ten. And they all agreed to that. And that's what it's become. So when I hear today people talking about, oh, the Center is controlled, that's not the situation. The Center has a mission; the mission is to get people, East and West, together so that they can get to understand each other. And the Center has never dictated how policies get—we don't tell people [INDISTINCT] and this is a policy of the United States, this is how the policy ought to be. We leave it up to them to talk about it amongst themselves, and they can say, Oh, this is how we see things, somebody else sees some other things. And they come together, they begin to understand each other. We have a journalist program also. When you think about a person who writes, that person reaches a lot of people. So what we tried to do was to bring the journalists together, and then have them go off to Asia and begin to talk and listen to people who have different points of views, and they begin to understand what is happening in different parts of Asia. And now, they don't write like they used to where they're biased. They write with an understanding

of how things are out there in Asia. And to me, that's a very important role of the Center also.

**When you were Governor, you had to learn a lot of protocol, because you made state trips. What's the most interesting protocol you learned in dealing with somebody from a foreign country? I don't know what country, but any.**

Respect for them. And after I left the Governor's Office—when I was there, I had started PBDC, Pacific Basin Development Council, a council made up four governors, one American governor and three territorial governors. We got together and tried to talk about the things that were important. And very often, it was very critical of the United States and the Interior Department, and we were able to talk about, oh, how do we get around this problem. And by doing that, I was able to communicate with the State Department people, Interior Department people, I was able to talk to our Senators and our Representatives about what had to be done to help them. And that became very important. Leaders of Samoa, Tonga, and Federated States of Micronesia; I used to get them together, and we formed at the East West Center a Pacific Island Development Group. And when I became chairman of the board, in the organization chart, I wanted to be sure that that block was not below the president, but it was aligned at the level with the president so that they could feel that they were important, being acknowledged. Pacific Island leaders, they're small countries, and they feel that they are ignored and are not given the special attention that they require. And I think that's what we need to remember, that no matter how powerful a country we are, when we talk to somebody else, some other country, we need to acknowledge that they are the heads of the country, and that we have to be very courteous in treating them, dealing with them. And for example, when I went to Thailand, my first trip to Thailand we had Prem Tinsulanonda, who was the longest serving prime minister. He walked off the seat as I entered the room, came up to me, and he embraced me. Which was kind of a rare thing to happen, a man embracing another man. And then, he told me words that I still remember so clearly: Friendship is not about how long you know a person, friendship is about how you feel towards a person. And he said, I consider you my friend, and I feel very strongly about mutual feelings about each other.

**And so, the Boy from Kalihi's political career lasted more than three decades, from the Democratic Revolution of the mid-1950s, through an unprecedented thirteen-plus years as Governor. At the time of this conversation in 2012, Ariyoshi is eighty-six years old, and continues to work in Downtown Honolulu as a business consultant. He travels internationally to build diplomatic and cultural connections between Hawaii and our Asia-Pacific neighbors, but Ariyoshi's favorite times are spent with his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Despite his years of experience, Governor Ariyoshi says he learned from people who are far too young to recall his years in power. He values the time he spends talking with high school students, and says they give him great hope for Hawaii's future.**

**Thank you, George Ariyoshi, for sharing your long story short. And thank you, for watching and supporting PBS Hawaii. I'm Leslie Wilcox. *A hui hou kakou*.**

For audio and written transcripts of this program, and all episodes of Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox, visit pbshawaii.org.

If you feel that a person is against something that you want to do, and you push him off on the side, that person is gonna continue to be strongly against what you want to do. But if you bring him in, and you ask the question, Tell me why you're against this, what's your feeling, you begin to understand why people are opposed to certain things you want to do. You find out that maybe what you're trying to do is not good enough, that you gotta make some modifications to accommodate some differences that may exist out there. That's one thing that could happen. The other thing that could happen is that maybe you feel that, oh, after going through all this, that what I feel now, what I want to do is so important, and we're right, and we going to stick by our guns and we going to do this. And then, ask people to come and join in that effort.