



## The Senate

STATE CAPITOL  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

Senate President Ronald D. Kouchi  
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Aloha! Thank you, Senator Kahele, for getting us off to such a smooth start. I would like to acknowledge and recognize all of our special guests, but, in respecting people's time, I would ask the Clerk to insert the names that were read off by Senator Kahele in the introduction as if I had just gone through everyone again, and then I'd like to acknowledge all of the special guests on the floor and in the gallery, and I notice that we have an array of councilmembers—would the councilmembers please rise?

What I'd like to do is begin my remarks this morning by saying the same thing I said two years ago: I am the one to speak on behalf of the Majority today, and I know if my colleagues had the chance to speak, the first thing that they would say is "thank you" to each and every one of their family members, to their friends and their tremendous supporters who sacrifice so much and who work so hard to allow us to sit in the seats we now occupy and have taken the oath of office for, so, to each and every one of you, thank you so much.

I have the privilege, as the one who speaks, to share a story, so I would be remiss if I didn't introduce to you, sitting next to my mom, Carolyn, one of her best friends, Kazui Nakata, with whom my mom worked with as employees of First Hawaiian Bank. From 1982, when I first decided to run for the Kaua'i County Council, through all of my campaigns, this woman has done everything from sign-waving; canvassing; frying fish tempura, chicken; to opening up her big garage because we couldn't afford to buy t-shirts, and we silk-screened the t-shirts to get our campaign underway back in 1982. And how do you find the words to say thank you to her and so many others like her, who have worked so hard, that have given me the opportunities that I have enjoyed today. I had a chance to meet my wife, Joy, while I was in office. We had our two sons, Dan and Egan, who are joining us here on the stage this morning, while I was in office. When I first started as a councilmember, I simply wanted to create economy for young people like myself to move back to Kaua'i, and then I became married, and then I started having children, and my view of what my life's mission was as a member of the council and now the Hawai'i State Senate dramatically changed, and now my greatest passion is to create a Hawai'i where each and every one of our children would make the choice to come home. We can't force them to come home because we educate them; we create the better path for them than we had, and when they become successful, then they make choices because they are good enough to decide what to do. I had always lamented at my 50 percent success rate: Our younger son, Egan, upon

finishing college on the mainland, chose to come back and work on Kaua'i, and it was a blessing to have him back home and see him every day. Now, I am so proud to stand before you today as a 100-percent success story: Yesterday, our son Dan moved back from the mainland after working there for six-and-a-half years, and started working here in Honolulu. Just because I have reached my goals doesn't mean that I'm not going to fight to make sure that each and every one of us can feel as happy and as proud as my wife, Joy, and I are. Yesterday, dropping him off at work, I had to buy him breakfast, so Dan being home may result in me taking a little economic hit, but it's certainly worth it. So I stand here more committed than ever to create that Hawai'i that our children will choose to come back to.

Before I get into the issues that face this legislature, I did want to introduce one special guest who's sitting up here with me on the stage. Senator English and I, a couple of weeks ago, had the opportunity to attend a leadership conference in New York City for leaders across the country, and one afternoon, they put us on a bus and we went to the 9/11 memorial and we got to hear from the deputy director of the memorial, who lost a brother that day in the towers. We also heard from a docent who was a New York City firefighter, one of the elite rescue firefighters who helped so many people get down through a stairway to safety that day, and when the building came down on him, he sustained injuries that disabled him and forced him into retirement, and he now volunteers as a docent, and he lost the other five members of his company who responded that morning. I share that with you because I'd like to ask Dan Moynahan, the ex-firefighter docent who was injured as a 9/11 responder from New York City, who's with us today, to please stand, and let's recognize Dan. Thank you for being with us here, Dan.

The first issues that I'd like to highlight that we will be tackling in the Legislature, acknowledging the work of our first responders, is, we have not forgotten that, while the lava has taken a timeout, the devastation on the Big Island is left there for the residents to deal with. There is so much more work to be done. To Mayor Kim, the councilmembers who are here, I can tell you the members of your Senate delegation have been in continuous contact with the rest of their colleagues here in the Senate, and we are committed to work with you in continuing to help the Big Island recover. We are not going to be strong if each one of our counties aren't strong, and so we want to see you prosperous and healthy again. Mayor Carvalho, who sang "Hawai'i Pono'i," was the Kaua'i mayor dealing with the world-record floods on Kaua'i in April, we have not forgotten that Kaua'i needs help. The devastation of the rains that caused the flooding also greatly impacted east Honolulu, and they continue to need help. We will be looking at what are the appropriate resources and how we can work with you to make sure that each and every one of your areas recover.

At the top of the list, I'm sure we're going to have some vigorous conversation on legalizing cannabis, and we look forward to those bills going through the appropriate committees and going through the process. We are going to also have a serious discussion about the incremental increase of our minimum wage. We have reached \$10.10, which was the last incremental raise the last time we passed the minimum wage bill, and so that will be on the list.

But, most importantly, we kind of joke around when we get to the portion of the program of certifying member credentials because, what's the big deal? You know, the election is over, but this year, there were two races whose results were contested. The Hawai'i Supreme Court recently upheld Senator Fevella's victory but has not decided one council race here on O'ahu. To rectify the problem of having Senator Fevella be in limbo for such a long period of time and to address the remaining unresolved council race, I believe we need to do two things: One, last year, we passed vote-by-mail for Kaua'i to be the experiment or pilot project; I believe we need to do vote-by-mail statewide. Two, we need to look at our election laws because they are out of date, and they were written at a time when voting was done in a different way, and we need to make sure that, whether it's an automatic recount or some other mechanism, that we don't leave legislative bodies or executive branches in limbo because we cannot resolve the election results in a timely fashion, and I believe we need to give clearer direction to the courts about what that process should be, and so I hope that we'll be able to achieve that goal.

Clearly, homelessness continues to be at the top of the agenda, and we made an unprecedented commitment to funding affordable housing last session. That was the first step. Clearly, we need to continue the effort to fund affordable housing, and having permanent affordable housing is the key to having the transition from homelessness into having housing that they can afford to live in. We still recognize there are many reasons for homelessness and why people aren't in homes, and so it needs to be a multi-tiered approach; there is no one-size-fits-all.

We need to continue to support our kūpuna. If you aren't aware of it, we have the oldest demographic population of any state in the country. The other good news is, at 80.3, Hawai'i has the longest life expectancy; California, at 80, is the second. And while it's great that we have the technology and the lifestyle that allows this long life, we need to deal with all of the other things that happen as you get older: Caregiving; how do we ensure that you have now planned adequately for retirement when your initial savings as a young person didn't envision your ability to live so long? And your options shouldn't be to just keep working and not have an opportunity at some point to enjoy life. It should be to work with everyone to have them on a financial plan to ensure that there is an opportunity to enjoy some of the fruits of their labor and spend time with their family. I'm not going to put any pressure on my single sons, but, you know, I would not mind being a grandparent sometime soon. (Are they smiling?)

We talk about working with the administration. For these homelessness programs, for our affordable housing programs, taking care of our kūpuna, funding the pre-K programs to start them on the right path to education, the support for K through 12, as well as our community colleges and universities, we need money. Now, we sent a bill to the governor several years ago to collect the taxes that aren't being collected from Airbnb in the hopes of getting to alternative accommodations. I will let the governor know I stand ready to work with him on finding a bill that will allow us to collect these funds so that we can deliver the money to create the lifestyle or opportunities that our seniors deserve and to create the opportunities for our children to get the education that they need and that they deserve so they can compete with anybody in the world.

But at the top of my list is my worry about the economy and where we're going next year. Most of the financial analysts on the major financial network news shows say that a recession is

coming. And so I appreciate Senator Dela Cruz and the philosophy that he has taken about A) being fiscally conservative, to make sure we have the money before we spend the money, and B) if these are the great programs we want here, then he needs to see a column of what it is we're going to do to create the economy and create the revenue so that we can fund the desired programs. When I saw the governor's budget message, I was excited. Normally, in the first year of the biennium, we put in \$1.2 billion for capital improvement programs. He is suggesting \$2 billion, and \$2 billion says about fixing our prisons; \$2 billion says *investing in affordable housing*; \$2 billion says *investing in the infrastructure that is sorely lacking here, improving classrooms, and supporting the rest of our community*. But, most importantly, if the recession is coming, and times get tougher, and the construction bids get more competitive, then the government gets better pricing on our projects, and we can stretch the \$2 billion to do a lot more than what we originally hoped. And, more importantly, at a time when nobody else is putting money in the economy, the State of Hawai'i will be putting the money in the economy, making sure that people are going back to work, that people are spending those dollars in our economy, so that we can have a healthy and vibrant Hawai'i.

The second thing, and this comes from the governor's inaugural remarks: Technology is the future for us, and Senator Keohokalole—I've been practicing that and debating whether I wanted to be brave and go there, but there's no way for me not to mention technology and to mention what I am expecting of Jarrett. He is brand-new to the Senate, and he and Stanley Chang and Dru Kanuha are three thirty-somethings, which we almost never have in the Senate, but he has a wealth of knowledge in the technology field. But, even more importantly, if you talk to him, he has an incredible passion about what he wants to do. And so I had asked the caucus to take technology out of business and economic development, tourism, not get it lost behind tourism and other activities, but put it out on its own, get someone with the passion to lead it, and let us run with technology because I do believe, like the governor, that technology is the next frontier for us to derive great economic success, and so I look forward to great things from technology.

But, last and most importantly, and I talked about this two years ago, when the sugar plantation closed on Maui, and what was going to happen on the central plain, what was going to happen to all of that land, and I had envisioned farming activity, and I envisioned biodigesters, which would be able to create fertilizer, create feed for livestock, or create energy because what you put in as additives to the fuel stock determines what comes out at the backend of the biodigester. I am pleased to have former lieutenant governor Shan Tsutsui and Tiare Lawrence of Mahi Pono sitting with me here and their commitment to make sure that the agriculture activity thrives on the central plain of Maui; how about a big hand for them? The reason why I bring this up is that I am most passionate about a program the former lieutenant governor started, which is Farm to School. They started with three schools in Kohala; they did a few schools in Mililani. We have added positions to the Department of Ag and the Department of Education to ensure the continuation of this program, and we had students help create menus; we sourced products from local farmers and ranchers. I listened, at the most recent Farm Bureau meeting, to the deputy director of Agriculture tell the farmers of Hawai'i that, if you convince the Legislature to give us the funding we ask for, we will meet the goals of doubling food production in Hawai'i. Well, I got up after her and said, no, that's not how we're going to get there. The path there is easy: The Department of Education serves 100,000 meals a day, it is the largest restaurant in the State of

Hawai‘i. We have prisons that we run and feed inmates, and we have state-run hospitals with cafeterias, where we feed patients and workers if they choose to buy our food. We have the land in the central plain of Maui now, all of the land on the Big Island. We have nonprofits that have land on Kaua‘i and, as the global footprint is shrinking for the seed companies, they are returning land to ADC and private landowners across this state, and growing less seed corn, that makes opportunities available for us to plant food that we consume. And we control all three of those silos, and I submit to the governor and his administration that I stand ready to work with you to see how we would be able to interface with each other and make all of this work. I am frustrated and tired of hearing about why we **cannot** do it, and I would like to go to work with people who are going to tell me **how** we’re going to do it, and if I get upset because it’s not going fast enough, it’s not about who I supported for what office. It’s about my desire to support the people of Hawai‘i; it’s my desire to see our children who are going to school, that they have the proper meals so that they can maximize their potential and perform at their best. And I am aware that for many of those students, their school lunch is either the best or possibly even the only meal they will be having that day, so it shouldn’t be something that they want to throw in the trash. It should be something that they enjoy eating, something that will nurture their minds and bodies and to have them perform at their optimum levels. With this model, we could then utilize the prisons and utilize the hospitals to expand our food production to reach our stated goals.

So, next week, on the 22nd, on Kaua‘i, at Kauai Veterans Memorial Hospital—I want to make your mouth water—and on the 23rd at Samuel Mahelona Hospital, they will be serving sautéed shrimp with butter garlic reduction and fresh parsley, ginger-marinated sweet potato tempura shrimp, stir-fried shrimp with oyster sauce, Cajun-style shrimp and andouille sausage gumbo, shrimp cakes with sweet chili aioli. The sides are a luau with poi gravy, taro, something I cannot pronounce (I think it’s Turkish), ‘ulu chips, ‘ulu chowder, and they are featuring locally sourced products from Kaua‘i Shrimp, Kuamo‘o Farms, Aloha ‘Āina, and Hawai‘i ‘Ulu Co-op. To all of my colleagues, if you were wondering what I was doing in the interim, it was trying to get this off the ground and lift it up. I encourage each and every one of you not to settle for anything less, and let us all run together and make sure that this happens because it’s not just about feeding our children, providing a meal for our inmates, or taking care of our patients and workers in the hospital, but it’s ensuring that we are reinvesting, cultivating, and keeping our fields green, not creating, like the problems in Lāhainā, where you have fallow land and brushfires that threaten local communities. We need an active agriculture, and we need to revitalize the economy, and, last and most importantly, it will create incredible renewable energy opportunities because there is nothing that should be wasted. When we do the value-added program, all of the waste that we don’t use should go into that biodigester so that we can create the byproducts and we can create the energy that will show the way about how we can lead for the rest of the world.

We have adopted the 100-percent-renewable-energy goal for Hawai‘i, and I would be remiss if I didn’t close by bragging about Kaua‘i. Last week, they just had the blessing for the opening of the AES solar battery farm; Kaua‘i has now hit 50 percent renewable energy to the grid five years ahead of KIUC’s strategic plan. With their newest solar program and hydro projects that are coming online, it is hoped, by the end of 2019 or early 2020, that Kaua‘i will have hit 70 percent renewable energy to the grid, so it is not a theory; it’s not something that they just talk about. On Kaua‘i, we are leading the way and showing you how to get it done, so I look forward

to working with you and helping each and every one of you achieve the kind of goals that we've been able to achieve on Kaua'i. So, I would like to close by simply quoting Gandhi: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." I hope we all achieve that for the next session for the Hawai'i State Senate. Mahalo.