



HAWAII HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**OPENING DAY REMARKS
2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION
SCOTT K. SAIKI
HOUSE SPEAKER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JANUARY 16, 2019**

INTRODUCTIONS

I would like to make some introductions before beginning. There are several guests, so please hold your applause until the very end.

Governor and Lt. Governor

First, Governor David Ige and Mrs. Ige.
Lt. Governor Josh Green and Jaime Ushiroda

Hawaii Supreme Court

Chief Justice Mark Recktenwald

Associate Justices Paula Nakayama

Sabrina McKenna

Richard Pollack

Michael Wilson

Office of Hawaiian Affairs

Chair of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Colette Machado

Former Governors

Former Governor George Ariyoshi and Mrs. Ariyoshi

Former Governor John Waihe‘e and Mrs. Waihe‘e

Former Governor Neil Abercrombie

County Mayors

Big Island Mayor Harry Kim

Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell

Kaua‘i Mayor Derek Kawakami

Maui Mayor Mike Victorino

County Councils

Big Island Council, representing Chair Aaron Chung, Councilmember Sue Lee Loy

Honolulu Council Chair Ann Kobayashi

Kaua‘i Council Chair Arryl Kaneshiro

Maui Council Chair Kelli King

Congressional Delegation

Representing Senator Brian Schatz – Malia Paul

Representing Senator Mazie Hirono – Alan Yamamoto

Representing Congressmember Tulsi Gabbard – Kainoa Penaroza

Representing Congressmember Ed Case – Jackie Conant

Ninth Circuit

Former Attorney General and now Judge on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, Mark Bennett

Consular Corps

We also have members of the Consular Corps. Could you please stand

Armed Forces

Could the representatives of the Armed Forces please stand.

Fukuoka

Special Guests -- Chairman of Fukuoka Prefectural Assembly Fukuoka Jungo Inoue, and six members accompanying him

Please give them a hand.

FAMILY INTRODUCTIONS

My parents, Richard and Sue Saiki.

My wife, Patsy Saiki.

FRESHMEN MEMBERS

Next, I want to introduce our new members.

This year, we have 10 new House members.

Can the members please stand and remain standing when I introduce you.

First, from District 11, a small business owner, ocean paddler, and proud owner of two Rottweilers, Representative Tina Wildberger.

From District 23, a Manoa native, former stock broker and accountant, and former neighborhood board chair, Representative Dale Kobayashi.

From District 36, a former public school teacher, President of the Women's Relief Society, and Mililani AYSO team parent and coach, Representative Val Okimoto.

From District 43, a Nanakuli High School graduate, a lifelong resident of the leeward coast and homesteader, and a former neighborhood board member, Representative Stacelynn Eli.

From District 46, a former social studies teacher at Mililani High School, and a fierce public school advocate, and a recipient of various outstanding teaching awards, Representative Amy Perruso.

From District 48, a Castle High School graduate, a former University of Hawai'i faculty member, and a mother of two, Representative Lisa Kitagawa.

From District 49, a public school teacher and attorney who was once an intern with Senator Dan Akaka, and vice president of the Kāne'ohē Christmas Parade, Representative Scot Matayoshi.

Not counting today, one member has served in the House for 11 days, so he is a hybrid freshman:

From District 8, a former executive assistant with the Maui County Council, a valedictorian at King Kekaulike High School, and a son of famous persimmon farmers in Kula, Representative Troy Hashimoto.

Finally, two of our new members are returnees.

From District 7, Representative David Tarnas.

From District 41, Representative Rida Cabanilla Arakawa.

Please give them a hand.

As you can see, this is one of the largest and most diverse group of freshmen members we have seen in a while.

More than half are women. Their ages range from 34 and up. Their backgrounds and experiences vary.

This group represents a new generation of political leaders.

They are focused and are anxious to get to work.

And they know that there are some serious challenges ahead of us.

There is one growing condition that I want to discuss because it affects all of us.

As we already know, regular people are having an increasingly difficult time making ends meet and the divide between those with and without resources is growing.

In 2017, the Aloha United Way and Hawai‘i Community Foundation joined with private sector partners to conduct the first ALICE report in Hawaii.

ALICE is the acronym for “Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed.”

ALICE includes people who have income above the federal poverty level, but not enough to afford a basic household budget that includes housing, child care, food, transportation and health care.

The findings are troubling.

There are 165,000 ALICE households in Hawai‘i. This represents 37% of total households.

There are another 47,000 households that live below the federal poverty level. This represents 11% of total households.

This means that 48% of Hawaii households are ALICE and below.

There is another sobering statistic. For the first time since statehood, we have experienced two consecutive years of population loss.

Last year, 12,430 residents moved to other states.

How do we help ALICE households?

The major ALICE drivers – income and housing– are issues that the Legislature can and has worked on over the years.

But it is time to revisit them.

We need to re-examine wage disparity, while also considering the impact on those who pay wages, and especially small businesses that, unlike other states, provide medical insurance and other benefits to their workers.

Another cause is the availability of affordable housing.

Last year, the Legislature appropriated \$200 million in cash and \$300 million in tax credits to subsidize the development of affordable rental housing units.

This year, we will work with the Administration to ensure prompt implementation of these funds.

We also appropriated \$30 million to develop transitional units for homeless persons modeled after Kahauiki Village. The village is a self-contained community that was initially comprised of 153 transitional homes, a preschool, a market, and a police meeting room that operate from a PV-generated battery system. This model can be extended to populations with substance abuse and mental health conditions.

This year, the Legislature will oversee the Administration's implementation of projects like Kahauiki Village.

It is within our control to ensure that government funds are well-spent and produce their intended results.

All pocketbooks are hit when funds are misspent – the pocketbooks of those who pay taxes and those who expect to receive services.

The House intends to fulfill its role as an important check on its fellow branches of government, and we will do so in the following ways.

THREE OVERSIGHT SUGGESTIONS

1. We must reaffirm the Legislature's policymaking role.

The Hawai'i Constitution gives the Legislature the authority to approve the state budget, appropriate public funds, and to enact laws.

This is how the Legislature sets policy for our state.

No other branch has this authority. At times, the Legislature has abrogated this role to the Executive and Judiciary branches.

But to fulfill its constitutional purpose, we need to reassert the Legislature's policymaking role.

Unlike the Executive and the Judiciary, the Legislature provides a venue in which ideas may be regularly introduced, debated and voted upon.

In other words, policy is made here in this chamber through a democratic process.

The House has an advantage because of our composition. We are comprised of 51 members. We represent some of the smallest units of government. Our members know their constituents and have a pulse on what real people are thinking.

And, unlike the Executive and Judiciary, our ideas and decisions are tested every two years by our constituents through the election process.

The Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, John Roberts, said it succinctly when he wrote the following:

“In a democracy, the power to make the law rests with those chosen by the people. [The Supreme Court’s] role is more confined – to say what the law is. That is easier in some cases than in others. But in every case we must respect the role of the Legislature, and take care not to undo what it has done.”

The bottom line is that for everyone to do their job effectively, the three branches of government must not overlap. If one branch of government exceeds or disregards its authority, then government becomes dysfunctional. If government is dysfunctional, then the public interest suffers.

2. We must listen to others and particularly those who are affected by our work.

So how do we assert our policymaking role in a beneficial manner?

By listening.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said:

"It is not only important but mentally invigorating to discuss political matters with people whose opinions differ radically from one's own. . . Find out what people are saying, what they are thinking, what they believe. This is an invaluable check on one's own ideas."

We should spend more time listening to others.

We especially need to view circumstances through the lens of those who are impacted by them.

Some of the most contentious issues in Hawai'i arise when people believe that government does not consider their perspective or history.

We need to draw upon the experience, circumstances, and knowledge of all our people, and especially those impacted by our work – single working mothers, seniors on fixed incomes, business owners, cultural advocates, and recent college graduates who want to stay in Hawai'i.

3. Be prepared to compromise.

Governor John Burns said: "Any fool can take a stand."

Now that we serve in the Legislature, we know that Governor Burns was correct.

It is easy to be a liberal.

It is easy to be a progressive.

It is easy to be a conservative.

But it is not easy to be a problem solver when the problem is complicated and has no real answer.

Problem solving requires hard work, reflection, and, most importantly, compromise.

President Barack Obama said it best in his Farewell Address to the Nation.

He said:

"Understand, democracy does not require uniformity. Our founders quarreled and compromised, and expected us to do the same. But they knew that democracy does require a basic sense of solidarity—the idea that for all our outward differences, we are all in this together; that we rise or fall as one."

President Obama went on to say:

"[M]ost issues are rarely black and white. That even when you're 100 percent right, getting things done requires compromise. That democracy doesn't work if we constantly demonize each other. That for progress to happen, we have to listen to each other, see ourselves in each other,

fight for our principles but also fight to find common ground, no matter how elusive that may seem."

This year marks the 60th commemoration of Hawai'i's statehood.

Look at how our state has changed in just 60 years.

In 1959, the state population was 622,000 people. Today it is 1.4 million.

In 1959, gross state product was \$1.5 billion. Today, it is \$88 billion.

In 1959, there were 29,000 senior citizens. Today, there are 254,000.

In 1959, there were 273,000 students in high school and below. Today, there are 306,000.

With these changes come different benefits and challenges.

But remember that along the way, Hawai'i has been significantly ahead of the curve.

Hawai'i was the first state to require employers to provide medical insurance to their employees.

Hawai'i was the first state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Hawai'i was the first state to require that 100% of its electricity be produced from renewable sources.

The list goes on because Hawai'i has been pursuing a progressive agenda even before it became vogue.

The House will continue a progressive course in a pace that is appropriate and best for all of Hawai'i's people.

And remember that what sets Hawai'i apart from all other states and Washington, D.C. is that we govern as a family.

We gather.

We argue.

We decide.

And then we eat.

The House is a leader.

Be confident.

Stay focused.

Take risks.

And then you will effect profound change for our entire state.

Thank you and have a great legislative session.

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