



The Senate

STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

Senate President Ronald D. Kouchi
Opening Day Remarks
30th Legislature
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I told my colleagues that we're going to say, "Let's get to work," and then let's go because I didn't expect anybody in the gallery, so you've messed me up here this morning. I will begin by saying what I said at the beginning of each of my previous remarks. To each one of our family members, to all of the friends and supporters from each of us have, who have the privilege to sit in the seats on this Senate chamber floor: We want to express our sincere gratitude for everything that you have done to give us the opportunity to serve the people of Hawai'i. As the President, I am fortunate enough where I can introduce my wife, Joy, who's sitting in the gallery, and my eldest son, Dan, and his girlfriend, Katie, sitting next to my wife, Joy. I was told, if I was making that introduction, that I had to clarify that Katie is the proud product of Maui nō ka 'oi, and she's not a Kaua'i girl.

The other thing I'd like to say is that we have many philosophical differences, and we have passionate philosophical arguments among ourselves as we go through the course of the session, but you cannot help but feel a family tie to all of the members here because of the time we spend together, and we get to know each other personally. And I know, recently, Senator Thielen, Senator Riviere, Senator Rhoads, Senator Kim, Senator Kahele have all lost parents, and, this past November, I for the first time experienced that, losing my dad. In 1982, he was the person who was most influential in starting me on a career of government service, and this is the first time we're going to have the Opening Day of a legislative body I serve in and he's not present. Like all of you and others who have lost their parents before this, I better understand the emptiness that you feel, the longing and how much you miss someone whose counsel you could rely on, someone whose only motivation in advising you was your best interest, that they weren't interested in any other kind of personal gain, just to see you do your best—and, most importantly, at least in the case of my father, the person who was unafraid to tell me when I was off-base, to tell me when he thought I was wrong, and to tell me what he thought the right path would be to get back on. So, thanks, Dad; I miss you a lot, appreciate everything that you have done, and, like all of my colleagues, for their late family members, we appreciate the differences that they've made in their lives.

I would also like to give you a report very quickly before I talk about the future. Last year, I talked about how we were going to double food production in the State of Hawai'i, how we were

going to get agriculture productive, and I'm happy to report to you that, before the end of 2018, the Kona hospital, state hospital, started serving farm-fresh menus in their cafeteria. In February of last year, the two state hospitals on Kaua'i, the Samuel Mahelona Memorial Hospital in Kapa'a and Kauai Veterans Memorial Hospital in Waimea, started serving farm-fresh meals on Kaua'i. When Dr. Linda Rosen of Hawai'i Health Systems saw what happened in Kona and on Kaua'i, she held a meeting of the state hospital board in February and they adopted a policy to convert all state hospitals in the next two years, now, to farm-fresh menus. On Kaua'i, before the farm fresh menus they were serving five to ten meals a day to employees. They are now serving in excess of a hundred meals a day and having requests from the community to come in. We talked back in 2013 about possibly closing and/or privatizing the whole state hospital system. What's happening on Kaua'i has now dropped \$55,000 to the bottom line, and while that may not be a large amount of money when you look at the operational cost of the hospital, we are not only getting better health outcomes for our patients, for our employees, but we are also adding to the bottom line and finding how we can pick the low-hanging fruit and turn it into positives. They have gone to over 60 percent of the meals served being locally sourced. That is significant because we don't have a dairy on Kaua'i, we don't produce chicken on Kaua'i, so there are quite a bit of items that you cannot produce locally to make that farm-fresh meals happen, and so they've made great strides. Last week Monday, the 15 public schools on Kaua'i, two years ahead of the rest of the DOE statewide, have started serving farm-fresh meals for our students on Kaua'i. It has been, at the hospitals and the schools, an incredible collaboration process with the HGEA and the UPW. We could not make this kind of change without the unions working hand in hand with us to make all of this happen. We have gotten tremendous private-sector assistance; Chef Mark Oyama, the head of the culinary program at the Kaua'i Community College; the executive chefs at several of the hotels have volunteered their time to come out; and a collective group of growers; and we are trying to set up the distribution systems and the procurement systems that we can take this out statewide. The Big Island: How do we recover from the devastation of the lava flow, and with all of the land that you have, I am still optimistic that this is going to be a game-changing program to assist you. With Mahi Pono taking over the central plain of Maui, I did call Mahi Pono when I read about the 50,000 pounds of food donated to the food banks. I said, "We don't need that many for the schools on Kaua'i, but a little bit might help out," so I'm trying to work with them to be sure that they're going to actively engage in the farm-to-school program and create better meals for our students, so I am incredibly excited. First Lady Dawn Ige has been a great partner: She has been primarily focused on the healthier breakfasts and better participation than the 50th place—out of 50 states and the District of Columbia—that Hawai'i currently rates, and is working very hard to move us up and make sure that our kids have nutritional choices. It is clear that they learn at a better rate when they are well-fed and able to think clearly.

Yesterday, January 14 2020, we had a press conference, so I'm not going to get in the details because the committee chairs talked a lot about it. I simply want to say that we have received criticism over the years for a process shrouded in secrecy. We have received criticism for getting to a point of agreement too late in the session so there's too little time for input from the public on important legislation. And by coming forward yesterday with four bold initiatives and laying them out to the public, we are hoping to create a more transparent process. We are hoping to create a process that is going to engage our community.

Last year, we partnered with Pacific Resource Partnership to have a phone app to try and engage younger voters, and last year, we voted for all mail-in ballots. We are working hard to address the concerns of the working men and women of Hawai'i. We are working hard to address the issues about Hawai'i not being affordable, and losing our most valuable asset, our people, because they can't afford to live here. And we are striving hard to get better engagement by creating communication tools that are more comfortable for people much younger than I am, and by making voter accessibility much greater. I look forward to what we are going to collectively achieve. I am incredibly proud, at a time when we look in Washington, D.C., and see the divisiveness in our nation's capital and the gridlock, when I see the news reports about state houses across the nation that are unable to work, that we have been able to come together, talk to the House, talk to the Governor and his administration—Lieutenant Governor Green is here with us this morning to show his support and willingness to work together—that we are going to be a shining model for the rest of the nation. Thank you very much.