



The Senate

STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

Senate President Ronald D. Kouchi
Opening Day Remarks
29th Legislature
January 17, 2018

I come before you this morning in a state of confusion. My staff and I had worked diligently on my opening remarks, and then the events of Saturday morning transpired, and now I'm left with the choice of what to say. And then I debated: Do I talk about Saturday's events first and hope you remember everything else I say, or should I say the whole speech first and end with Saturday's events and hope you remember what was said in the beginning of my speech? But I'm going to just begin with Saturday's events. Much has been written; numerous press conferences have been held. We are committed to make sure that it never happens again. On Friday morning, at 10 a.m., there will be a joint hearing by the House and the Senate in the Capitol auditorium. We will continue to work with the administration to find out what we need to do to ensure that best practices are employed and how we can carry out our responsibility to ensure that each and every citizen and guest of this state is going to be safe, and that accurate information is delivered.

Having addressed Saturday's events, I'd like to go on to the other issues that face us. The other year, I spoke before the governor gave his State of the State address – and he said, “Well, you just basically stole my speech.” So, Governor, I'm going to try to be polite to you this morning and focus on one area and give you the rest of the room for your State of the State address on Monday. We have talked much about homelessness and the varying strategies to address this issue. We've talked about affordable housing, the need to fund and the commitment to build those affordable housing units, yet in the area of affordable housing, 2,000 affordable housing units were targeted on property owned by the State of Hawaii where the offices of the Hawaii Housing Finance & Development Corporation resides. However, after community meetings, it was determined that the carrying capacity of not just the roads, sewer and water lines, but also the carrying capacity of the residents themselves, that 800 units would be more appropriate. This example highlights the challenge that, while we have plans and we have commitments, we need to engage with community to make sure that we're going about doing this job in a responsible way. We need to ensure that, with rail going forward, we deliver on the promise of affordable units along the rail line and transit-oriented development. We have heard from Dr. Pressler that we may be seeing over \$12 million in cuts in federal aid; we need to ensure that we are protecting our kūpuna, and that we are providing adequate health services for each and every

resident of this state. We are committed to do that. We need to create an economy so that we are generating enough funds to pay for all of the things that we want to do.

But the one additional area that I'd like to highlight today, in the discussion of how we get affordable housing, how do we deal with some of the homeless issues, is through education. And it is only through education and creating opportunities for each and every child in this state do we give them the opportunity to close the income gap, to be able to reach for the stars and realize their dreams. In the governor's supplemental budget press release, there was very little note of an appropriation of about \$150,000 to the Pre-K program, but it's critically important to get that education to our children as soon as possible. What our Office on Early Learning hopes to do is create a better-quality program through the training that they're going to be able to do with the additional staffing. What they hope to do is work with our elementary teachers and get them better training so that, when students move from pre-k into the elementary schools, they are following into one seamless program, that the pre-k and elementary school programs complement each other to ensure the best possible opportunities for our children to get the best education. What we have – and Senator Kahele has been a champion in this chamber for – is the Promise Program, and right now it's only at the community college level, to assist students with their tuition so that financial need is not an obstacle to higher education, that each and every resident in this state is going to have the opportunity – if they desire – to go on to higher learning, that that door will be open for them to walk through. And I know that we are committed to work on expanding the program and making college a reality for each and every student in Hawai'i. Along the line of the Promise Program is the Early College program, where we are bringing university instructors to our local high schools and our students are then able to get college credits. When I talked to the principal at Waimea High School in west Kaua'i, my alma mater, where they have over 30 percent Native Hawaiian enrollment, they are seeing many students who are the first in their family going to college. They are able to get students into a college classroom at their local high school and make them realize that they have all of the talent, the skills, and the ability to succeed, and college isn't some far-away, impossible dream for them but a reality. We are seeing families who are financially challenged able to have their children get credits and achieve a leg up to reduce the cost of what college would be through the Early College program, and this is going to be another critical stepping stone to allow our children to find that pathway to success.

And too often, when our current K through high school students go to school, the school lunch is the only meal that those students are going to have that day, and, certainly, the best meal they're going to have. There is a pilot program that's been going on in Kohala, called the Farm to School program; it has met with great success and the DOE is starting to expand it to other schools, and they are sourcing local produce, local fruits. Last week, the DOE announced a program to use more local beef and have healthier, more nutritious lunches that our students are eating, and I have been talking to the Department of Agriculture to see if there is a way that the Department of Agriculture would be able to add some financial support to the school lunch program if the DOE has current contracts that are sourcing the products from our farmers and ranchers here in Hawai'i. If you don't know it, the Department of Education serves over 100,000 meals a day – the largest restaurant in the State of Hawai'i. If we have a commitment from the largest restaurant in the State of Hawai'i to purchase locally produced food, this is the way I see our

path forward: to bring all of that agricultural land that Senator Dela Cruz has been land banking into daily use, that we'll put in active production, and we'll be able to bring back farming and address the issue of food security.

Senator English, as the majority leader, worked diligently on the majority package; we have a brochure with the other priorities for the Senate. They are based off of the 17 sustainable principles of the United Nations. They should be in each office; as you go around and visit today, I encourage you to pick it up – because I'm told that my time is up, I have to keep the speech short today – so it'll be available to you to read. We have it posted online.

And in closing this morning, I would like to read a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King: "All life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality . . . Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality." And we certainly found out on Saturday morning how connected we are to each and every one, and no matter if you were on Kaua'i or the Big Island, here on O'ahu, when we feared for our lives, for our loved ones, the most important thing we thought about is expressing that love and appreciation for those who are closest to you. I encourage all of you to make sure that you go out and express your love and always be conscious of how your last words will be remembered, and whether you would want those words to be words of anger, and I know I want to be interconnected directly and indirectly in a positive way, expressing hope, love, and – certainly, with the governor here – I want to say that we all, 25 members of the Hawai'i State Senate, are committed to work on legislation that is going to produce the best results for the people of the State of Hawai'i. Thank you very much.