

“Better Days Are Ahead”
Opening Day Speech
January 19, 2011
Shan S. Tsutsui, Senate President

Governor Abercrombie, Lt. Governor and Mrs. Schatz, Chief Justice Recktenwald, United States Senator Inouye, United States Senator Akaka, Mayor Arakawa, Former Governor and Mrs. Ariyoshi, Former Governor and Mrs. Waihee, Former Governor and Mrs. Cayetano, Former Governor Lingle, esteemed colleagues, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen, . . . good morning and Aloha.

Today, as we have gathered here to start the 2011 legislative session, I open with this assertion—that “Better Days Are Ahead.” Together, we have weathered the worst of an economic storm that has battered us not only locally but globally. While our State continues to suffer from a sagging real estate market and high unemployment rates, we also see signs that we may be on the slow and arduous path to recovery, a journey in which we must concentrate all of our collective efforts to secure a better future, not just for us, but for our children and for future generations to come.

Today, all twenty-five State Senators come before you, humbled and privileged to lead our State into a new legislative session and to begin a new chapter in Hawaii's history. In cooperation and collaboration with the Abercrombie administration, the House of Representatives, county officials, and most importantly, the people of Hawaii, we can begin a time of healing and rebuilding for our great State.

As we begin this new journey for the 2011 session, it is true that we face many of the same challenges and issues from last year. We must once again address significant budget shortfalls, while continuing to provide necessary programs and services for our community.

Balancing the needs of today with one eye on the future will be critical. We know refusing to fund social programs may save a few dollars today, but ends up costing us more in the long run. We know burdening our residents and businesses with excessive taxes and fees may fulfill our immediate need for cash, but could slow economic recovery. We know that depending on tourism as our sole economic driver may provide benefits today, but not satisfy the need for the diversified economy that will support generations to come. And, we know that focusing on today's energy comforts over building our sustainable future in energy and agriculture robs our State and our counties of their full potential.

The recent report of the Council of Revenues and other economic forecasts indicate that our state economy may have begun to turn the corner. With an increased revenue forecast of an additional one percent, an Administration that is committed to getting people back to work, the promising fact that the State has also experienced a recent improvement in tourism with consecutive months of double-digit growth in both visitor arrivals and spending, your Senate is hopeful that better days are ahead.

While these examples indicate that hope is on the horizon, we must remember to be cautiously optimistic, but optimistic nonetheless. We must embrace a new attitude and a new sense of determination and purpose that will gain strength through our commitment to each other and our commitment to our goals.

Teamwork and working together will be key in moving us forward. Each of us here today, elected, appointed, and members of the public alike, play a crucial role for Team Hawaii. We must set aside our egos and personal interests and embrace our differences in working together towards our common goals.

The beauty of teamwork is that it allows each of us as individuals to accomplish something that is far greater than ourselves. It allows us to shoulder a shared burden and rely on the talents and skills of others, which together are far greater than our own.

Perhaps one of the greatest examples of teamwork and what can be accomplished when committed individuals work together is the remarkable story of the thirty-three Chilean miners who were trapped half a mile underground yet emerged alive seventy days later.

While you're all familiar with their story, there are two principles that struck me as instrumental in the survival and ultimate rescue of the miners, and they are hope and teamwork.

Hope lived in each of the miners and their families and friends, especially for each of the first seventeen days that passed before the miners made contact with those on the surface. Hope lived in the belief that they would eventually be rescued, even though the earliest estimations projected nearly five months before drilling could reach the miners' location.

Teamwork was also paramount. The miners benefitted from the leadership of one man, Luis Urzua, who not only rationed the provisions, organized the miners and their work, and assisted with the rescue plan, but also recognized and maximized the strengths and talents of his fellow miners and remained open to input from his team in ensuring their collective survival and rescue. Of course the teamwork did not stop there. Up on the surface, experts from all around the world rallied together to devise and successfully execute a plan for the miners' rescue, which ultimately came ahead of schedule.

With all that could have gone terribly wrong, their story showed us that with hope and teamwork the most impossible goals are in fact possible. And while our journey here will require hope and teamwork, we must also have a plan to reach those "better days."

To jump start our economy, the Senate will propose an aggressive plan to improve our infrastructure throughout the State and deal with years and years of deferred repair and maintenance projects. We will ensure that our schools provide a safe and proper learning environment, our roads are maintained for everyday travel, our hospitals are safe and operational, and our many state programs and services are properly housed and administered. We will also continue to modernize our harbors to create greater efficiency for commerce and the businesses that use them, and provide our airports with the re-modernization necessary to ensure safety, efficiency, and viability to help sustain our tourism industry and residential needs.

Secondly, the only way that we can prosper as a State is to prepare an educated workforce that maintains high standards for our students, teachers, and administrators, through additional funding and support. Therefore, the Senate will not only make sure that public school furloughs are a thing of the past, but will also provide for the overall advancement of our public education system.

To do so, the Senate will continue to focus on providing our State with accountability and leadership in education. We will do that by working together with educational leaders and stakeholders to increase the time our children spend with highly qualified teachers. And we will do what is necessary to make sure that every student graduates ready to succeed in a trade or college, a career, and citizenship. In addition, the Senate sees the University of Hawaii System as a critical component in our P-20 educational effort and will continue to direct resources toward strategic objectives with the goal of building upon the individual strengths of each of our ten campuses statewide.

This Senate also realizes that strengthening our economy and moving toward sustainability go hand in hand. Today, Hawaii still imports nearly ninety percent of its food from

the mainland and foreign countries. However, locally grown products can be less expensive, more nutritious, and, as we know, way more on than imported food. An increased investment in local agriculture will help us build a more diversified economy that is enhanced by industries such as tourism and other trades throughout our State. The Senate will work with agricultural leaders to increase its efforts to promote the sale of local products to the U.S. mainland and throughout the Pacific.

Equally important will be advancements in energy sustainability as the Senate will continue to work toward reducing Hawaii's dependency on foreign oil and maximize alternative energy options that will help us save money and help us save our aina.

While the Senate is focused on the budget, education, and sustainability, we will not lose sight of our obligation to provide resources for our Human Service programs. The Senate will continue to provide support to our keiki, kupuna, families, and individuals who are in the greatest need. And, as one of my favorite non-profits on Maui would say, let's work with individuals to provide a hand up and not a hand out and help people in need restore their hope, reach their full potential, and enrich their lives.

In addition, let us not forget our commitment to the Hawaiian people. With seven members of the Senate of Hawaiian heritage, we will look to them to lead us in dealing with issues that will affect the Hawaiian community. Let us work with stakeholders and move forward on a Ceded Lands Settlement to fulfill our responsibility to the Native Hawaiian community.

These are just a few of the many initiatives that the Senate will undertake this year leading us to better days.

Speaking of better days ahead, we are fortunate for the selection of Hawaii as the location for the upcoming Meeting for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, better known as APEC. The meeting will be held this November where President Obama will host APEC leaders who will focus on the development of widespread initiatives to help accelerate growth and create jobs across the Asia-Pacific region. The opportunity to host such a prestigious event provides our State with increased exposure and increased recognition as a formidable business destination. Let us use this opportunity to showcase our State and our culture to the rest of the world. This is an opportunity for us to plant investment ideas and capital that will have positive economic impacts for years to come.

Accordingly, we will remain undeterred from our mission; we will examine and thoughtfully consider individual issues and the bigger picture together.

To succeed, it will require compassion for those who are most in need, sacrifice from all of us, and a desire, an unshakable desire, to make things better.

This is a tough challenge that we face. At times we will need to agree to disagree. I believe we will rise to meet this challenge. And we will do so, not by pitting one against the other or by creating a society of haves and have-nots, but by coming together as one ohana.

We all have to be responsible and we all have to be part of the solution and that commitment must begin today as we prepare for the better days ahead.

Mahalo.