



# The Senate Ka 'Aha Kenekoa

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Senate President Ronald D. Kouchi  
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I left the office last night and said, “This will be short,” because everything that was a priority last year is this year, and we’re still dealing with the uncertainty of Washington, D.C., and the increase in health insurance premiums and how that may have a devastating effect on our community. And I got up this morning, and a friend of mine, former Major League Baseball player and manager Clint Hurdle, sends out inspirational leadership emails to people he’s met over the course of his career, Monday through Saturday. And on Wednesdays, he sends out a message related to legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden, who is famous for writing the book *Pyramid of Success*, which describes how not only he built his dynasty at UCLA basketball but the principles by which he lived his life and leadership. And this morning, he talked about Jack Clark, who has been the University of California’s varsity rugby head coach since 1984. His teams have won 28 national championships, compiling an overall record of 758–96 with 5 ties. His program has had domestic win streaks of 115 games, 98 games, 70, 63, and produced 135 All-Americans. In an interview with Jan Stenker for *Unconditionally Strong*, he discussed his definition and system of leadership, which includes everybody:

We say that the definition of “leadership” is the ability to make those around you better and more productive. It’s a skill to us. Leadership isn’t a rank—it’s not only for the coach, it’s not only for the captain, it’s not only for seniors. It’s a skill. We open up the leadership model; it’s not just the conventional model of a minority of team members leading the majority of the members. I just don’t happen to think that’s all that powerful. If I’m the leader, that means everyone else is a follower, and I’m not happy with that. I think where people get that mixed up is, they confuse rank and how you make decisions with who’s the boss with the leadership model. On this team, the leadership model is open for everybody. Over time, you look at leadership as a skill, not as a rank. When we really get it right, we have a lot of people on this team contributing to the leadership of the team. That gets pretty powerful. That’s magical, almost, to see a bunch of people trying to make each other better and more productive. I think in a culture that values leadership as a skill, a person can ask himself at any point in time, “Am I demonstrating leadership characteristics now, or am I lost in my own little world?” As Coach Wooden liked to say, “It’s amazing how much we can accomplish if no one is concerned who gets the credit.” Authority, chain of command, and rank are needed on any team, but they

don't define the limits of who can contribute to leadership and helping others be better and more productive.

And as I read that, I realized that this is what I have aspired to over the last decade as the president of the Senate in the creation of a team and empowering each and every one of the members to make the maximum contribution that they can. To not be a top-down and "I told you what you're gonna do, so you'd better do it, or else" but "What is your great idea? How can I help you?" And toward that end, I would like to talk to you a little bit about my team.

We have the chair of Agriculture and Environment, Senator Gabbard, and we've talked a lot in the aftermath of Lāhainā about what do we do to mitigate against wildfires. Well, the best prevention is to have active crops in the ground. And if we have a productive agricultural community, then we are providing for our schoolchildren through the school lunches, state hospitals, and prisons better and more nutritious food; we're supporting our economy; and, boy, did we all get a real lesson during COVID about the food security issues that we face in Hawai'i. And Senator Gabbard will lead this charge.

Senator Wakai is the chair of Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs. We face some of the highest energy costs in the nation, and to continue to try to get that cost down and to do it in a more renewable, sustainable way will not only be good for business with the lower cost but good for our environment, and I look forward to Glenn's contribution in this area.

Senator Chang chairs Housing, and we all know: Housing and the high cost is the largest impediment to retaining our people here in Hawai'i or recruiting talented people to come here and collaborate and work with us. And we need to continue to fund the money into the pipeline. We've been putting record sums of money the last several years, but the permitting and the building process takes so long. We are now starting to see results, but we need to continue this commitment so our pipeline continues to produce year after year, and we can keep our young people home.

Senator Inouye is going back to her familiar Transportation committee, and as an island state, whether it's interisland travel for us personally, the delivery of goods and services, and on our highways, it's critically important, and we are happy to see her back in this capacity.

We have Senator Keohokalole, chair of Commerce and Consumer Protection, and one of the big things he's been working on the last few years is the cost of insurance. But there is so much in consumer protection—he's dealt with the Hawaiian Electric issues. He brings a steady hand and a wealth of knowledge, and look forward to what will be on his agenda this year.

Unfortunately, this year, we're going to say goodbye to Senator Rhoads, our long-serving Judiciary chair, and Karl has been unwavering in standing up for what is right and standing up for the small person. And he has received death threats and put his own personal safety at risk for doing what he's always believed to be right. I appreciate having worked with you, Senator Rhoads. You will be missed when you retire after this session.

Senator Lee is going to switch with Senator Inouye, and he's going to take the lead of Water-Land. And in Water-Land, you know, you have discussions of the leases, the protection of our natural resources, where some of the Green Fee money is going to be spent. A lot of controversies there, but I appreciate him willing to step forward and trying to work with Senator Inouye and the rest of us to put the best team we can in the right places for the Senate to succeed.

We have Senator DeCoite, the chair of Economic Development and Tourism. She's worked tirelessly in this area, and what is amazing to me is that she resides on Moloka'i, she does not have a hotel in her district, and yet much of her work is working with the hotel industry, and she has done a lot to learn a lot about that industry. I personally believe we need to have a vibrant film tax credit. We see the cancellation of series. We aren't "Hawai'i and they're just coming" anymore, and I would just share a brief story from my Kaua'i experience. I went out to West Kaua'i—the Waimea Plantation Cottages, which is a hotel that operates with refurbished old plantation homes, so it's not a traditional hotel. I commented to the manager, "Boy, this is February, and you're full." Well, she told me that it's incredibly cold in Canada at the time (and this is, like, maybe eight years ago in February). They watched the *Hawaii Five-0* on television, saw the sun of Hawai'i, good airlines rates because February, you know, happened to be slow and that, you know, the Cottages were greatly discounting the rooms, hoping to get guests to come, and they were filled up. And that isn't measured in some of the economic statistics when we look at the film credit, but that's the result of, you know, getting our message out to the world, so I look forward to the work that Senator DeCoite will be doing.

Senator Richards, the chair of Hawaiian Affairs: That committee is always exciting, and we thank you for your service. You know, some of the things that have been happening in the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands and activity—there are some who have been critical of Director Watson and the \$600 million. I am appreciative that there is action that we can debate about and not being critical of inaction, and so I appreciate the efforts that you put forward, Senator Richards.

Senator Elefante kinda holds a special place for me. We were gonna ease him in last year and he was going to chair Public Safety, and then the tragedy of New Year's happened, and all of a sudden, he was thrust in the spotlight for his work at the time on public safety. And he did a great job in getting fireworks legislation, among other things, passed. We had a much better New Year's this year. But he's now going to take over the Labor committee from Senator Aquino, who has retired, and we look forward to his contributions in that area.

We have Senator Kim, who is not only chairing Higher Education, but we decided, you know, to do K-12 with higher education, which used to be done in the past. And it's clear: Whether it's through pre-K or K-12 and our, not just four-year university system, but the community college system, if we want to create better opportunities for our children here in Hawai'i, education creates the ladder of opportunity. And the Senate has been focused on creating pathways that lead to jobs. We don't want an academy diploma or certificate that you put on your wall, and then you can't find a job. We want you to go through the process, and we want you to have vocational opportunities if that's what it takes because of where your interest and skill lie because we need a host of jobs. And that is how we're going to create a better, brighter future. I see the

superintendent in the gallery, and I think it's, you know, about time that we all got together to say that you need financial literacy to graduate from high school. How are you going to manage your personal finances—and, as a parent, your family's finances—make good decisions, and be in a position to be able to buy a home if that's your dream if you don't know how to manage your money? And so I look forward to what is gonna happen with Senator Kim's leadership in the two committees.

One of the biggest tasks labeled Senator San Buenaventura with everything happening at the federal level, whether it's SNAP or premiums on the Affordable Care Act, delivery of health services. With the job ahead of her, you know, I know we have a good leader on behalf of the Senate who will help make sure the most vulnerable in our community are protected.

And we have Senator Fukunaga, who is going to now take over for the Public Safety and Military Affairs committee. I guess I should have said, with Senator Kim, Senator Fukunaga, and I'll get around to Senator Ihara, they are our longest-serving members in not only the Legislature but also, in some instances, Honolulu City Council, so she will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the new assignment that she has agreed to undertake, and we look forward to seeing her continue the work that was started by Senator Elefante, especially in the fireworks area, to ensure our community stays safe.

I'm going to talk about Senator Moriwaki. The vice chair of Ways and Means also is responsible for capital improvements. And so we are looking at how do we deal with a slowing tourism market. Well, one of the areas is construction, and there is so much needed in the way of improving schools, getting pre-K classrooms, supporting other infrastructure that has been aging. And so the work that she will do in her role as Ways and Means vice chair will be vital to keeping our economy vibrant and strong, and I look forward to the job that Senator Moriwaki is going to do.

Of all the committee chairs, I was going to say, of course I saved the best and most powerful for last: Senate Ways and Means Chair Donovan Dela Cruz. You know, it was reported that—maybe I shouldn't say he's the most powerful guy in the Senate, but everywhere I talk, I say he's the most powerful guy in the Senate. He controls all of the money. But most people don't remember, when you first got here and thought you were chairing Ag and wound up in Water-Land, the mission was to acquire land, acquire Dole land, acquire land so that we could save it for future generations so that we could pursue an agricultural future; we could work on our food security issues. Some of the land eventually could be used for housing or to provide other facilities that we need to deliver the services. Senator Dela Cruz was one of the first when we were here in 2011 to talk about transit-oriented development and how we should be maximizing the opportunity that the rail was going to provide. In recent times, he's been a leader on the pathways that lead to jobs and not certificates. He's got the Innovation Center at Leeward Community College, which he's looking to take out to the other islands. We've discussed the central kitchen for the Department of Education as a way to hopefully buy more locally produced food to deliver better, more nutritious meals to our students. He is a true visionary, and in all of that time, he has continued to show fiscal restraint. And while we have been criticized at times for not using more of the rainy day fund, it has really rained on us a lot. We've had the flooding or storms in April of

'18 for Kaua'i and East O'ahu. A month later, the lava flowed in Puna and destroyed communities. We've gone through COVID. We've gone through the events in Washington, D.C., that have had tremendous impact on our budget, And yet we remain on what is solid fiscal ground, and we are able to continue to keep our eye forward to, again, protect the most vulnerable in our community.

Vice President Kidani, who also handles the communications of the Senate, has been a partner and a mentor to me since I got here in September of 2010. The whole time I've been the president, she's been the vice president. Her collaboration and support would not allow me to do what I've done, so I truly appreciate working with you, Senator Kidani.

And then we have Senator Ihara, who's the longest-serving member in the Senate. He is our policy leader, and he reminds us of what happened even before I was here, makes sure we stay on the straight and narrow, and his steady voice is appreciated in our leadership.

And then we have the children: We have Senator Kanuha; he's actually old—he's 41 now. And Senator Hashimoto is 38. Senator Kanuha is the majority and caucus leader. He and Senator Hashimoto, along with Senator Ihara, handle the referrals for the Senate. They bring energy to our leadership team and, you know, greatly appreciate their contributions.

And last, the person who has nothing is new Senator Lamosao. She has committee assignments, but, in the Senate, when you come here brand-new, you start at the very bottom. But it has normally happened, after the one session, you rise up quickly. She is an incredibly talented, bright young lady. I have enjoyed working with her in her various capacities before she's come to the Senate, and I look forward to seeing how incredible she's gonna be in the years to come.

I would briefly say that I have enjoyed working with the Minority. And while it is not our job to see eye to eye, it is our job to make sure we come to work to do the best job we can for the people of Hawai'i.

I forgot someone? And, Angus, your name is right here: chair of Government Operations. You know, I never read these things! This is the first time I've read it, and then I omit you, who made the middle-tier list of influential members of the Legislature. To Senator McKelvey: He's a former consumer protection chair in the House, and so, although he's chairing Government Operations here, he has been a wealth of knowledge and experience to assist Senator Keohokalole as he has chaired his committee. What Senator McKelvey brings that nobody else has in the Senate is, he lost everything in the fire of Lāhainā. And so, while he's here as a problem-solver and trying to get the results for his community, he is also able to share with us the other side. And while we may think we know what they want and how we should help them, he can tell us, you know, "You're missing the mark because, as someone who has lost everything, these are the things that are important to me. These are the things that are important to others." And at this time that we work to continue to support Maui, that vision and perspective that Senator McKelvey brings with his experience is invaluable. So I apologize, Angus; I really had nice things to say about you and appreciate you very much.

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With that, I will conclude my remarks.