

MEDIA EMBARGO UNTIL: 10:00 A.M. January 16, 2013

SPEAKER JOSEPH M. SOUKI
Opening Day Remarks
January 16, 2013

**My fellow members, and all of our guests, aloha and
welcome to the 2013 Regular Session!**

**Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to
recognize some of our distinguished guests:**

Senator Schatz and Mrs. Schatz;

Governor Abercrombie;

Lt. Governor Tsutsui;

Chief Justice Recktenwald;

Chair Machado;

And of course, Senator Akaka and Mrs. Akaka.

I would also like to recognize the former Governors; the Mayors and County Council Chairs; members of our military; and members of our Consular Corps.

And before I go on, I'd like to introduce my family.

Thank you all for being here to commemorate this momentous occasion with us.

We are here today to chart a path forward for our state.

With Hawaii's economy on the rise, construction stable, tourism up, and unemployment down, there is reason for cautious optimism.

This is the moment we have been waiting for.

Over the past few years, the state budget was cut by over two billion dollars. Meanwhile, wages dropped, health benefit costs rose, many people were forced out of work.

The homeless population still grows – among them, war heroes, persons needing mental health services, families unable to pay their mortgage or rent.

We have the chance now, to rebuild what the recession took away.

Investment in projects and programs throughout the state is critical. But to strengthen economic development and job growth, to restore public services, we need to proceed intelligently.

Members, if we want to restore the safety net, put people back to work, and provide the best education, including early childhood education,

If we want to take care of people's health, take care of our kupuna, and make sure the state's health care system transitions into the new era of health care – smoothly and without undue delay,

If we want to improve our roads, bridges, and transportation infrastructure -- to reduce traffic, improve the mobility of our residents, and enhance safety -- in every county,

If we want clean energy that uses the best renewable energy resources, including our ocean and solar resources,

If we want to be responsible stewards of Hawaii's natural resources and our native plants and animals,

If we want to increase farming opportunities on agricultural land and the market for locally-grown products,

If we want to support the tourism industry and promote the Hawaii product to the world,

If we want to do all these things the people require -- and yes, I know we do -- we must enhance our revenue stream. We must put together a mix of strategies that will generate more state revenues ---- equitably.

One option may be to rethink tax credits. No, I'm not saying we should abandon all caution and fall for the marketing hype. Instead, let's learn from our experience and do our due diligence. The film industry claims a tax credit

will generate \$350 million in revenues for the State. Should we turn our back on this? Let's give it a serious and thorough look first.

But increasing revenue does not mean placing an unfair burden on those who can least afford it. Members, the top personal tax rate was down at 7-3/4 percent at one time and now it's up to 11 percent – the highest in the nation. It's time to look at rolling back the personal tax burden for people with lower incomes and the middle class, at least incrementally, over the next few years.

Members, I am humbled and honored to stand before you today.

Over my 30 years here, I have seen many faces come and go. I have seen our communities prosper, struggle, and prosper again.

But one thing that remains constant is the privilege and price of public service.

All of us know what it's like to walk the district. We go door to door -- we talk to our constituents. We ask them to entrust us with their vote and a seat in this chamber.

The price for this privilege is the responsibility each of us has to conduct ourselves with compassion and dignity. Every day, as you walk down these halls and on this floor, remember the hopes and dreams of the people of this state -- and do your best for them.

Before I close, I would like to thank Speaker Calvin Say for his 14 years of leadership as Speaker of the House, and for maintaining the fiscal solvency of this State.

I look forward to working with each and every one of you this session. Thank you, very much, for the trust you have in me. Aloha.

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