

Opening Day Speech
January 18, 2012
Shan S. Tsutsui, Senate President

Last year we began with the assertion that better days were ahead. Today, we find ourselves in a position to reflect on the past year's accomplishments, and realize that there has been progress, and we have laid the foundation for even better days.

Twelve months ago the Senate found itself in a position to stand united and work with the House and the Governor to pass a balanced budget in a timely manner, no small feat given the 1.2 billion dollar budget shortfall that we faced. The work that was done last session to address significant budget deficits involved making tough decisions that required certain sacrifices and, as we all know, plenty of compromises.

Despite budget woes, many other "accomplishments" were achieved in the past year, which had an immediate impact. Some were revolutionary in changing the status quo while others helped to lay the groundwork for future success and prosperity.

Most notable includes legislation to provide for the recognition of Native Hawaiian people. This law helps us to continue on what has been a long journey to obtain federal recognition and begin the process towards true reconciliation between the Native Hawaiian people and the government of the State of Hawaii and the United States.

Also adopted was Act 48, a mortgage foreclosure measure that ensures the rights of the homeowner, and a fair and due process to deal with financial institutions.

Additionally, in response to the People's vote, we implemented a new law to provide for an appointed Board of Education to shepherd our public school system. As one of the State's highest priorities, the appointed Board allows the Governor to have greater control as well as accountability over the administration of our public schools.

We also passed legislation that established the Public Lands Development Corporation to develop state lands and generate additional revenues for our state. The legislation passed allows the PLDC to enter into public-private partnerships and utilize local, national, and international capital.

It is the leadership and decision making of not just one, not of a few, but of 25 members of this body that defines our successes.

And, yes we have already begun to see some of the successes and the positive effects of our challenging decisions. In recent months, the Administration was able to hold a robust bond sale that demonstrated a strong desire for investors to invest in Hawaii's future.

This bond sale not only repaired our overall debt structure, thereby enabling Hawaii to afford additional construction projects in the future, but along with a healthy carry over balance, the State will begin to look at a schedule to restore the Hurricane Relief and Rainy Day Funds, a

commitment, that was made when it became necessary to tap those funds due to the faltering economy.

Instead of going our separate ways at the conclusion of last year's session, House and Senate members continued to work in preparation for this year. We also forged a stronger relationship with House leadership, and that effort has resulted in the reconvening of 8 conference committees beginning today. This is the first time in at least a decade that an agreement like this has been reached. Through continued discussion, both House and Senate leaders also agree that investing in our state facilities while streamlining the process for repair and maintenance projects is not only necessary, but critical to providing a boost to our local economy.

Our theme this year is, "Pupukahi I Holomua" . . . "Unite to Move Forward." Let this guide us as we begin this year's session. During the interim, the Governor unveiled further focus to his New Day Plan. This included three main objectives—growing a sustainable economy, investing in people, and transforming government. This year, let us pledge our support to the Administration in its commitment to these objectives.

First, let us address job creation through emphasizing smaller repair and maintenance projects. Let's invest in our aging infrastructure to maximize the utilization and extend the useful life of our state-owned assets.

Next, we will work towards streamlining and simplifying the permitting, and procurement processes. We must enable both the public and private sectors to move forward, and ensure that government is able to provide services to the public in the most efficient manner possible. We will look for these changes while protecting our natural resources and maintaining a fair and transparent process.

Furthermore, we will continue to support and encourage the development of alternative energy sources to further implement the Hawaii Clean Energy initiative. Let's aggressively implement green initiatives and make us a leader and an example for the world to follow.

Transforming the way we operate through the use of technology will also be critical in reducing the long term cost of government. Technology can create greater efficiencies, allowing government to provide greater levels of services, all for a lesser cost. We must be committed to support our new Chief Information Officer and invest in a system that better connects our residents and businesses with their government.

We are also committed to supporting the Board of Education's initiatives to improve our public education system. Let us work in collaboration with all stake holders to not only insure that we retain race to the top funds, but that we maximize its returns to provide the best education possible for our keiki.

Let's also utilize the data and recommendations provided by the Justice Reinvestment Initiative Working Group. These policies will, reduce spending on corrections, reinvest savings in strategies that will lower crime rates, and decrease prison population growth. Holding its last meeting just yesterday, the Working Group developed policies and initiatives that target cost-saving strategies and promote timely rehabilitation.

Lets also work with the House of Representatives to carefully review the administration's proposed OHA settlement agreement. This agreement would represent a significant step forward in providing compensation for the native Hawaiians. This proposal will need to be vetted, by not only the Legislature but throughout our island communities, to ensure it constitutes an appropriate settlement for the Hawaiian people as well as the State of Hawaii. We look forward to a continued discussion and final resolution of the matter in the near future.

In support of these initiatives, I expect, by the end of next week that this body will roll out a bipartisan initiative that will play a major role in defining this legislative session. This bill, Senate Bill Number 2012, which will be referred to as "The Invest in Hawaii Act of 2012" will aggressively address the long overdue backlog of repair and maintenance issues that plague our facilities throughout the State. With the leadership of Chair Ige, Vice-Chair Kidani and the members of the Ways and Means Committee, we will work with State departments and agencies to identify a collection of projects that are shovel ready and permit ready.

This bill will have two primary objectives, one to aggressively cut into the State's multibillion dollar deferred repair and maintenance backlog, and second would be to immediately create jobs for our local residents.

Projects would be seen in every single one of our 255 public schools, all 10 University of Hawaii campuses, all of our State hospitals, and provide work for painters, roofers, electricians, masons, plumbers, and local engineers, just to name a few, in every corner of our State, and in return generate millions of dollars in disposable income throughout our economy.

By doing these projects we will provide our keiki with a safer and better learning environment, provide our kupuna with better medical facilities, as well as improve state facilities for our residents and visitors to enjoy.

In addition to improving the physical structure of our facilities, this measure will directly address another priority of the Senate. Investing in sustainable and renewable energy products, photovoltaic, solar, wind, thermal, and hydro-electric energy, we will further implement our strategies to increase energy efficiency and reduce energy consumption. If photovoltaic panels were installed in all of our public schools the state could realize a savings of over \$500 millions of dollars over the next 20 years alone. Not only will these efforts result in cost savings and reduce the drain on the State's general fund resources, but also reduce our carbon footprint.

Finally, this bill will kick start the State's investment in a technology system that makes government services easier to utilize, provides greater access to the neighbor islands and to rural areas on Oahu, all while reducing the operating cost of government. Through technology there will come a day when people can get a marriage license without standing in line, businesses can apply for permits without mailing in forms, tax returns can be issued on the same day, and most government services can be accessed from home or work.

So, let us unite and move forward "Pupukahi I Holomua" with "The Invest in Hawaii Act of 2012," the Governor's New Day initiatives, and all of the Senate's priorities to create a better Hawaii for today and the future. Mahalo...and let us begin...