



The Senate

STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

Senate Minority Leader Kurt Fevella
Opening Day Remarks
31st Legislature
January 19, 2022

Thank you, Senate President. I'll just start off: Governor Ige, Lieutenant Governor Green, Senate President Kouchi, Vice President Kidani, distinguished guests, family and friends, members of the viewing public, on behalf of the entire Senate Minority Caucus, I say a warm aloha and good morning to all of you. I want to thank my Heavenly Father for the many blessings that he has bestowed upon me and my family. I come from the community of 'Ewa Beach, where I love to surf and I have the great opportunity of being here. I want to say a big mahalo to my constituents of Senate District 19 for giving me the opportunity to serve them. Mahalo for voting for me, representing our awesome community of 'Ewa Beach.

I was blessed to be raised in a loving, supportive family thanks to my parents. They worked very hard to provide for me and my family. They instilled the values and principles that I carry with me today. My father, who is still with us, along with my wife, Donnalee, and my daughter, Abigail, constantly remind me to never forget the working-class families like us. Many of these families live paycheck to paycheck and face ongoing battles to make ends meet. It hurts me to see many families struggling—financially, mentally, psychologically, and emotionally. I can very much relate to their pain, because I see that the pandemic is not one of the biggest challenges that we face this legislative session. As the Senate Minority Leader, my passion is to help advance economy equality for our struggling families.

I stand ready, as I always have, to reach across the aisle to work with my colleagues to support reasonable living wages, to boost the economy on our hard-working families. The last time we raised the minimum wage was in 2018, which is now \$10.10 per hour. The time has come for change.

In order to support an increase in the minimum wage, we have to make sure that our hospitality industry is on a good path to recovery so that we can be strong in our economy. Thanks to my mom, who's no longer with us, I learned that she valued her work in the hospitality industry. Going forward, I will continue to be a strong advocate for our number one industry. A lot of people are saying that that's not our number one industry. Right now, it's reversed. Agriculture was our number one industry back in the day, and now hospitality is here. If we do not make the industry strong, then it's hard to get our economy moving forward and try to get our farms and our agriculture up to par.

As a product of our public school system, and as a parent of a daughter who attends James Campbell High School—go, Sabers—I have firsthand experience in volunteering and working with the schools in my district. So whether it's a problem at our public schools or at the university system, (which you know that I'm passionately trying to beef up University – West O'ahu (go, Westside)), going forward, know that I will strive to make things better for our children.

With respect to specific legislation, the Senate released priorities for our 2022 session. One of the Senate's priorities and first areas of focus is to address the affordable housing shortage and providing great access to affordable housing for Native Hawaiians. This is one of my highest priorities. One of the bills that I have introduced will allow local families who are renting an affordable housing unit to save for and live in home of their own.

And, finally, I'm hoping that, this session, we'll be able to help law enforcement, use the latest technology to locate and respond to explosions caused by illegal use of fireworks and, of course, firearms.

In closing, at the end of the day, when I stand and sit in my office, looking out the window, looking over to the statue of Queen Lili'uokalani, it reminds me of why I'm here. She improved the quality of life for our families and our constituents and advocate for what's right for our people. Because all of what is said and done, the community is, to me: God, Family, Community, and the People of Hawai'i. It is who we represent here.

When I came here—and this is straight from my heart, not from the book—when I came here, each and every one of you, through the Senate President, Vice President Kidani, Senator Dela Cruz, Senator Kim, constantly guide me, and Senator Breene, (God rest his soul,) always gave me the opportunity to come to their office, ask questions. I sat down with them and they were always willing to share. If we are going to show anybody in this State that we can work together as one people in this building, reaching across the aisle because I—the Minority, with you—the Majority, it doesn't make no sense at the end of the day if we can't and the people suffer.

Senate President, you moved me today, along with Senator Acasio, because those things really matter. Having families that cannot go to school for education because their children don't have the proper feminine hygiene is very serious. People don't realize it. Mental health issues which people don't take seriously enough. We don't share it because Hawaiians, growing up, it was taboo to talk about mental illness in the family. I brought this up when we had the rallies, Senator Baker having this discussion in the Health Committee. I'll let you guys know this issue means a lot to me because, when we were growing up, we didn't know what was wrong with my mom. It took years and years until she found a doctor, only to find out that her menopause was causing her mental illness. So we had to go from there, she had to do the surgery she needed to get on the path of recovery. But because nobody knows about these things, we always thinking that they acting, "Oh, they are not depressed, they joking," and then they kill themselves. These are serious things that we need to take very seriously—houselessness, mental illness—going forward.

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Thank you again, Senate President. Thank you, my colleagues. I'm willing to work with you and I look forward to an awesome session. Take care, God bless. Mahalo.