

Opening Day Speech
Senator Colleen Hanabusa
2008 Legislative Session
January 16, 2008

I stood here before you a year ago, having assumed the Presidency of the Senate for the first time. On that day I informed you that the overarching theme of the Senate was *sustainability* for the future of our state. I asked you to remember that this journey to sustainability would not be quick or easy, and that it would require all of us to remain focused and patient in achieving our goals.

Since then, the Sustainability 2050 Task Force has completed another year of work and has published its report. We expect the standard litany of criticism: “There they go again, doing another report, and spending more taxpayer dollars.” This standard criticism would be valid if we, as policy makers, did nothing with the wealth of facts and concerns provided by those who took the time and responsibility to get involved in our work and share their views of sustainability.

We are taking action on the work of the task force. Our Senate majority package includes bills that will help address our housing needs and our educational needs. Bills that will help our kupuna, help build sustainable communities, and help improve our tax base. Bills that reflect the needs and desires of our state and our people.

The 2050 Task Force reached out to our community as no other working group has before solicited and received the thoughts and input of individuals, groups, and businesses. From the corner offices of Bishop Street to the corner store in Ka‘u. From the construction worker in Wai‘anae who relies on the building boom to feed his family, to the taro farmer in Hanalei who relies on the land to feed his community.

The task force heard the concerns of parents who fear their children will have to find lives and careers away from their *ohana*. Developers who sincerely want to find a way to preserve our open spaces and agricultural enterprises while providing homes for our people. Environmentalists who recognize the tension between the need for economic development, and the need to ensure our precious quality of life. We talked about every aspect of our lives that will contribute to building our *preferred* future. Sustaining our environment, our housing, and our educational opportunities.

Thirty years ago we also looked at the need to plan for our future. And we must recognize the person who had the foresight to lead that effort: Governor George Ariyoshi. In his 1978 State of State Address, Governor Ariyoshi presented what was then called the State Plan. Today we call it sustainability, but what he said then we must still heed today: "*The fundamental question underlying everything we do is whether we have the spiritual determination to be the masters of our destiny.*"

That is our challenge, and our time is now.

Over the past year, two events came together to show me—in stark terms—the crossroads that we stand at today.

The first was some concern over what we all came to lovingly refer to as “that darn boat.” Love it or hate it, the Superferry was the lightning-rod question of the year.

On its face, the Superferry issue seemed only whether or not the state should have granted an environmental exemption to allow the ferry to operate. But the Superferry controversy was not about a boat, or a mode of transportation, or the environmental laws of this State. It was about how that single question—like a pebble hitting a rock hitting a boulder—created an avalanche.

It was about people feeling irrelevant, ignored, and helpless. It was about communities dividing, positions hardening, and people losing hope.

Worst of all, it was about fear. The fear that one's future was no longer within one's control. The fear that tomorrow belongs to *them*—and not to *us*. The fear that the ferry somehow symbolized our future, good or bad, and whether we like it or not. The fear of what *is* the future? What is the Hawaii that we will have in twenty to forty years?

This manifested itself in what we legislators had to deal with in the Special Session. The questions of Honolulu-centrism. Us versus them. Neighbor islands versus Oahu. Locals versus new arrivals. And then what was not said but clearly there: Growth versus the status quo. Development versus agriculture. Urban egotism versus rural reverse-elitism.

These labels showed us the division in our community. But how deep or how hardened it is—how long we allow it to remain—will determine how we address the challenge of our shared future.

For those of us who heard the Superferry testimony on the neighbor islands, we asked if we can cure this divide over all of those polarized positions.

But then, just as the Superferry erupted, seemingly out of nowhere, we experienced another phenomenon. A phenomenon that made it clear that the people of this State *can* pull together. The phenomenon of Warrior fever. The shared experience of watching our football team go undefeated in the regular season.

The deep shadows of the Superferry battles faded in the bright light shone by our pride and ownership in every win of the UH Warriors.

Joined together by this unprecedented string of victories, united in our admiration and gratitude for the talent, commitment, and determination of those young men and the coaches who showed them the way, we were again one community. This was a thing we shared, a unique expression of what we are together, and what we can accomplish when we share a goal.

Of course, the football team was not alone in bringing home a WAC championship. Later today, the House and Senate will honor our WAC champion women's soccer and women's volleyball teams, along with the football team. For those of you keeping score, that is one championship for the men, and *two* for the women.

Each team has shared the pride of our community. On the court and on the field, they brought us together, united us by being united themselves. They demonstrate to us the potential of a shared commitment.

Every player on each of those teams has brought his or her own talents and abilities to the table and integrated them into the common effort. Each is a part of an indivisible and undeniable whole. And they know that while being a winner takes effort, being a champion takes even more. It's that *extra something* that propels the player, the team, and the community to the next level.

I am proud that we are joined today by President David McClain and representatives of the University of Hawai'i Athletic Department. Interim Athletic Director Carl Clapp, and Associate Athletic Directors John McNamara and Marilyn Moniz-Kaho'ohanohano. Coach Dave Shoji of the University of Hawai'i Women's Volleyball Team. Assistant Coach Derrick Kato of the Women's Soccer Team. Associate

Head Football Coach George Lumpkin. And, as of this morning, Head Football Coach Greg McMackin and his wife Heather McMackin.

These coaches and their counterparts across the UH athletic program know the importance of looking at the long term. For them, the concern is not just with this game—or even this season. They are already looking to the future, to the players they will need for the *next* great team, and to the strategies that will allow them to compete in new ways among a changing slate of opponents. So while a coach can never lose focus on what the team needs now, he or she also can never lose sight of what they will need in the seasons to come.

The sense of pride and ownership and hope that we shared, the victories and championships that brought us all together, are the product of vision, commitment, and toughness. And the question is: can we as policy makers live up to this example?

The answer is, "Yes." *We must.*

A few months ago, at a meeting of the Hawai‘i 2050 Task Force, someone asked a group of nine student participants how many of them saw themselves in Hawai‘i at age thirty-five. The student members are all in Hawai‘i public and private high schools and represent some of our finest young minds. And faced with that question, not one raised their hand. None of them saw a future here at home.

Now, I have nothing but respect for these young men and women. I think I share the opinion of the entire task force that they are doing our state a great service by participating in developing our Hawai‘i of tomorrow. But I will tell you: I intend to prove them wrong.

If we cannot make Hawai‘i a place where our best and brightest can build a rewarding future, then we will have failed. And we will not fail.

Last year, I told you about a photo I keep next to my computer, a picture of Nick Smith, who graduated from Wai‘anae High School after participating in the Searider Productions program. Nick went off to college at the Art Institute in Santa Monica to pursue a career in media production. Well, Nick has graduated from the Art Institute. He is an extremely talented young man and I have no doubt that he has many opportunities on the mainland to build a great career.

But Nick is here today. And not only Nick, but the rest of the Searider Kids, as I call them, who went off to college and are also joining us today, Sam Kapoi and Solomon Alfapada.

Nick, Sam and Solomon came home to Hawai‘i. And it is not just because they sincerely believe that they can find careers here, but because they are dedicated to helping build an industry that will offer similar opportunities to other talented young people in the future. They will be among those who help instill that sense of pride, that sense of ownership, and that sense of hope in their generation and the next. They are here, making that extra effort.

Also joining us are student leaders from thirty-two middle and high schools across our state, here today at the invitation of their respective Senators. These are the leaders of tomorrow.

When we talk about sustainability, when we look at the future and plan for our preferred Hawai‘i, *they* are what we are really talking about. The Hawai‘i of *their* future. A Hawai‘i that provides for them and the families they will raise. Strong economic

opportunities, a clean supportive natural environment, a place to live and a place to work—for these young people and the generations to come after them.

We are not going to let them down. I am not going to let Nick, Sam, and Solomon down. We as policy makers and community leaders can bring this state together to overcome the fear that divides us and instead ignite the pride, the shared purpose, and the hope. That is the driving force behind our efforts.

For the leaders of tomorrow, we must provide leadership today. This is truly a time for great leaders. A time to demonstrate our determination to master our destiny. A time for a vision that extends beyond our immediate needs and our petty differences. And the effort cannot be limited to this room or this Capitol building.

A sustainable Hawai'i is a Hawai'i that we will share. This time, there is no "them;" it is all "us." This time, we all play for the same team.

The victory is on *our* future.

Thank you.

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