

House Majority Leader – Rep. Kirk Caldwell
Opening Day – Hawaii State Legislature
January 16, 2008

Mr. Speaker, distinguished guests, friends and family, members of the House, we all came to public office with dreams.

I was reminded of the importance of this principle about a month ago, when Senator Nadao Yoshinaga visited my office.

From humble beginnings in Wailuku, to a local and national leader in health care reform, the Senator has a record that would make any elected official proud.

When he visited, we talked for a quite a while. At the end of our conversation, I asked him, "If you had it to do all over again, would you change anything?"

He told me: "I would have dreamed bigger."

Those words reminded me, and should remind us all, of just how critical it is to take what we believe and apply it to the way we solve problems and approach the future.

There is a forest of cynicism out there, and we cannot give in to it. Instead we must deal with it, defy it, and be guided by what is right.

Community leaders do this every day. One such person is Nanci Kriedman. She has committed herself to ending domestic violence.

Nanci has involved some of us in the annual Men's March held every October to end violence against women.

The theme of last year's march was "dispelling the myth." The message is that we must change the way we frame the problem if we are really going to solve it.

Violence against women is generally thought of as a women's issue. But it's not. It's a man's issue.

It is men who must change to solve the problem. And it is all men who must help by taking responsibility for ending something which is so innately wrong.

So Nanci's dream begins by calling on men – uncles, coaches, clergy and neighbors -- to act as good mentors. We can start early with boys and end the bad behavior before it becomes habit. Real men will champion the responsibility.

Thank you Nanci. The simple act of redefining a problem can give birth to new solutions.

We have all heard the quote from the bible which goes, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Fortunately we have community leaders who have vision to spare.

Among them is James Koshiba, one of the founders of Kanu Hawaii. James left a successful consulting firm to lead this dynamic, new organization.

Kanu calls on all of us to fulfill our kuleana – our obligation to neighbors in need, our cultural traditions, our children and our environment.

Using creative technology, James and the young leaders who founded Kanu have added a new twist to activism.

Kanu displays, in real-time, data on their website to show us how individual home grown actions really do make a difference and how our commitments add up.

Yet with all the high-tech, James and Kanu are still grounded in the timeless island values of respect, humility, and aloha that bind us all.

Through personal change and social action, Kanu Hawaii is helping us reach those "bigger dreams."

My daughter and I used Kanu to make new commitments to improve our world. She pledged to conserve water at home, and I committed to buying from businesses that are good stewards of their community.

With Kanu, we rediscover that the call to action comes from each of us. Because that's where change starts.

So all around us there are people who are dreaming bigger and acting on behalf of those dreams. And what do each of these leaders have in common? The status quo just isn't good enough.

And no, it is not as simple as having the right bumper sticker or motivational poster. As we all find out at one juncture or another, values only mean something when they are tested.

And the road tests can get pretty tough. In the session ahead, let's ask ourselves: are we operating from a value system that perpetuates what is best about our island home?

Or are we, slice by slice, mortgaging away the future?

Who are we building for? Not just the brick and mortar infrastructure, but the energy we produce from the islands, the foods we grow and the industries and jobs we develop.

Think about this. According to the national report card for states, between 2000-2005, Hawaii converted cropland to other uses faster than all but one of 50 states in this country.

When is enough, enough? Are we really thinking of the needs of people who will be here when we are long gone? Or is that just something on a "keep the country, country" bumper sticker?

And perhaps most importantly for us as elected officials, has it become so easy to take the cheap shot and criticize government that we are losing the all important combination of affection and guts it takes to really dig in, change government and make it better?

So let's ask ourselves: Is government fit for the future? What are we doing about it? These are real tough questions to answer. Yet all around us -- as we've seen today -- there is human inspiration.

Right now I understand we have some celebrating to do out in the rotunda with our University champions. Our capitol is filled with young people who

dreamed bigger and delivered. It is alive with the hopes of tomorrow and the will to work for a better future.

Dream bigger, Senator Yoshinaga? You bet.
Thank you.