

Opening Day Remarks

House Majority Leader – Rep. Blake Oshiro

January 21, 2009

Governor Lingle, Chief Justice Moon, Lieutenant Governor Aiona, House colleagues, honored guests, family and friends.

Yesterday was indeed an exciting day.

Despite the uncertainty in these economic times, the air was charged with an electricity of change inspired by our newly inaugurated President Barack Obama.

But change can take many forms.

It can manifest into tragedy -- into sudden and complete loss.

Such is the change that the house will endure with its loss of Representative Bob Nakasone. In these times, there will be many many days when we will miss his insight, his wisdom, and his advice.

But, change can also be transformative, evolutionary. Just as with our new president, it can bring much needed hope.

Such change and hope will be embodied by the newest additions to our

Majority Caucus:

- **Representative Henry Aquino of District 35, Pearl City, Waipahu;**
- **Representative Isaac Choy of District 24, Manoa, University;**
- **Representative Denny Coffman of District 6, North Kona, Kailua-Kona;**
- **Representative Gil Keith-Agaran of district 9, Kahului, Wailuku,**
- **Representative Chris Lee of District 51, Lanikai, Waimanalo;**
- **Representative Mark Nakashima of District 1, Kohaha, Hamakua, Hilo; and**
- **Representative Jessica Wooley of District 47, Laie, Kahana, Kahaluu, Kaneohe.**

I've worked with these new representatives over the past few months, and can attest to their commitment, vision and hope that they will bring to our caucus.

As you stated Mr. Speaker, our state budget will be the major challenge.

But, this struggle will be an opportunity to

Re-examine, to re-evaluate, to re-prioritize.

As posed by President Obama, the question is not whether government is too big or too small – instead, the question is whether government is improving the lives of its people, and doing so effectively and efficiently? That is the task that lies before us this session.

Procurement

First, what we need to do is be smarter about how we spend taxpayers money.

In these times where every dollar we have is precious, we cannot and should not allow an agency to be found to spend an excess \$34 million on voting machines because they failed to do a cost/benefit analysis.

We cannot and will no longer tolerate the auditor finding that contracts spent millions of dollars on tourism marketing campaigns with no performance standards to measure success.

This leads us to procurement. The very mention of the word can cause people's eyes to glaze over, or roll into the back of their heads.

But, what procurement can do is direct where government spends taxpayers' money and prioritize what's important.

For example, our laws have a 'preference' for local products. Agencies are supposed to give local vendors a break and purchase preference. It's like the federal "Buy America act."

In 2006, we've even passed a small business set-aside so that our small businesses are supposed to be given state contracts.

Yet despite what's in the law, nothing is happening. Local farmers are not enjoying the benefit of this policy. But do you know why? Because the "rules" that are supposed to implement the laws, exempt fresh produce, meats and foods! I know, "How can?!?"

When I was growing up and things made no sense, we'd ask "how can?" like how can the laws we pass provide for local farmers and small businesses, but the rules take it away?

Therefore, we will be fighting to get rid of these ridiculous rules so that our local small businesses and our local farmers get the preference they deserve under the law.

This will not only be a smarter way to spend taxpayer dollars, but will move our state towards self-sufficiency.

Energy

When we speak of self-sufficiency and its effect on the economy, nowhere is that need more dire than our addiction on imported fossil fuels.

We spend anywhere from \$5 – 7 billion annually to feed our need for energy. Despite being uniquely situated for renewable energy sources like solar, wind and wave, we have not been able to harvest these clean and renewable energy sources.

The goals are clearly set. The law sets the renewable portfolio standards at 20% by 2020.

More so, there's agreement between Hawaiian Electric and the State to get to 70% by 2030.

But the bigger question is how do we get there?

The Hawaii Clean Energy Initiative has a plan.

But, the House Majority will also be looking at an alternative approach – instead of top-down mandates, we will also seek to find approaches that empower our counties, empower the communities and their economies to build an energy infrastructure from the ground up.

Stimulus

And in speaking about building capacity and infrastructure, the House Majority will also be focusing on the state's literal infrastructure as a much needed way to invest funds, continuing to prime the pump and keep revenue circulating in the economy. But, most importantly, it helps keep our citizens employed.

We are so extremely fortunate to have our Congressional delegation.

They have been working closely with us to understand and

communicate our priority projects to the federal government and to the new administration.

But we cannot rely only on the federal government, for we must be able to do for ourselves. Towards that end, our Governor and her administration have proposed some bold and innovative possible infrastructure investments in our highways and in our recreational areas.

These will be given serious consideration.

Collaboration and disagreement

This brings us to the area of collaboration. Going into these session, there have been efforts at collaboration and communication between the executive branch and legislature that often may have appeared to be missing in the past few years.

These are welcome changes and we hope that they will continue because it is only by putting our collective heads and hearts together that we will be able to strive and overcome the difficult issues we face ahead.

Now of course this does not mean we'll be sitting around singing "kum ba yah."

The people expect us to agree when we can, but there are times when that is just simply not going to happen.

For example, the House Majority will fight the termination of the Keiki Care program. This was one of the first in the nation, an innovative and quintessential public/private partnership to ensure that no child is without health insurance. And all at an extremely modest cost. We will be doing everything we can to ensure the continuance of this program.

I anticipate that this will be just one, of several examples where we will strongly and vehemently disagree with the administration, its position and its decisions.

But, what the House Majority is committed to is not to be about blame and not to be about doing things to take credit away from or to give credit to anyone.

In his book the audacity of hope, our President describes the public perception of political parties:

They are waiting for a politics with the maturity to balance idealism and realism, to distinguish between what can and cannot be compromised, to admit the possibility that the other side might sometimes have a point. They don't always understand the arguments between right and left, conservative and liberal, but they recognize the difference between dogma and common sense, responsibility and irresponsibility, between those things that last and those that are fleeting.

They are out there, waiting for Republicans and Democrats to catch up to them.

The public should not have to wait any longer. Because at the end of the day, at the end of the session, we must be judged as having done our best to live up to the oath that we have sworn to today. That we faithfully discharged our duties to the best of our abilities. Thank you.