

**OPENING DAY REMARKS
2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION
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SPEAKER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE
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My fellow members and guests, welcome to the 2015 Regular Session of the Hawaii State Legislature and aloha.

With our newly elected Governor with us today, I would like to welcome him and all of you to “The People’s House.” With great pride, we call this chamber the People’s House because the members of this body—more than any other branch of state government—represent the people.

In his inaugural address, Governor Ige talked about the importance of that simple idea. He said to remember that this is not his house, not our house, but the people’s house. It’s advice worth remembering, as we begin this legislative session.

The Governor also called on all of us to work together—that no one person can do the heavy lifting to carry us toward our goals. As a former legislator, the Governor understands how important collaboration is in bringing many views and options to the table.

However, coming together is no easy task especially when issues can be so divisive. As we all know, the devil can always be found in the details.

How do we get from here to there? From the present to the future?

I think the Governor said it best at his inauguration: To move into the future, we must bring as many people and ideas to the table as possible.

The best way to do that is by doing the hard work that makes a difference in their lives. When people see results, they get excited and want to be a part of the solution.

Last year, I asked you to be bold in tackling some very difficult issues. And you answered the call by increasing minimum wage, fixing HCDA and taking care of the state’s unfunded liabilities.

Thank you for having the courage to tackle those and other issues in the last session.

But that was yesterday and yesterday’s achievements. This morning, we must begin to take care of today’s business with the same determination and boldness.

That doesn’t always involve sweeping or pioneering gestures.

Sometimes, it just means doing the nitty-gritty work that allows government to function more efficiently and our families to pursue their dreams.

Healthcare

For example, we should complete the job of ensuring that affordable healthcare is available to all of our families.

Even if we disagree, all stakeholders need to stay engaged. There is no room for those who want to leave because the game gets tough. Because it's not just a game—not for the families who depend on good healthcare to grow and prosper. For them, we stick it out.

Collaboration is never easy. If it was, everyone would do it.

But if we are to finish the job of providing universal healthcare, then all stakeholders must come to the table, with an open mind and be willing to work hard for that goal.

Public Hospitals

We should also focus on our public hospitals, which is one of the largest public health systems in the country. In addition, it is the "safety net" for acute care and long-term care for the neighbor islands.

For those families, there is no other choice.

Therefore, it's important we ensure those facilities are there for them. And if that means thinking "outside the box" then maybe it's time we do just that.

Maui Memorial and Hawaii Pacific Health are looking at a public-private partnership that could improve healthcare on Maui and generate savings for taxpayers. It behooves us to study this opportunity carefully and look at legislation for this and other potential partnerships.

Medical Marijuana

We must also ensure the well-being of those who have unique health issues and who require a little more compassion from us. I am speaking of those who need better access to medical marijuana. Yes, it is legal in Hawaii. But there is no legal access to it.

The time has come to fix this contradiction. The task force we commissioned last session has said as much. So let's do what we should have done 15 years ago.

Education

Moving into the future also means preparing our children for that future.

All the studies tell us that early education is key to developing lifelong learners and successful

citizens. As the State continues to look at the more costly task of a public preschool program, there is much we can do to foster early learning in the meantime.

Last year, we made kindergarten mandatory for children who will make five by July 31. Yet we know there is still a small group of late borns who are falling through the cracks and whose families face financial hardships.

I believe we can go a long way in remedying this situation by allowing all five-year-olds to enter kindergarten regardless of the month in which they were born.

It is something worth exploring.

Energy

Moving into the future means making Hawaii more energy self-sufficient.

It means having the peace of mind, knowing that your company's bottom line or your family's budget won't be hurt because of a spike in the price of crude oil.

The handwriting has been on the wall for some time now. It doesn't take a rocket scientist—or an electric company—to know that we need to be more aggressive in weaning ourselves off fossil fuel. We need to help our businesses and our households move in the direction of conservation and sustainability.

It is imperative that our biggest energy provider understand this as well. Hawaiian Electric has been a part of this community for more than a hundred years. They have been a key player in our past and they play a critical role in the unfolding of our future.

We will be watching closely to what happens on this front.

Transit Oriented Development

Moving into the future means planning wisely for that future.

It means ensuring we build enough affordable homes for our families and growing our cities in ways that makes sense for transportation, economic development and our limited natural resources. Transit Oriented Development is a term you'll hear a lot about.

Basically, it will help us direct growth along our rail stations, encouraging commercial development around them and building affordable neighborhoods on nearby state lands. Directing growth in this way will also protect open space and agriculture, as well as minimize times when we are forced to choose between growth and the environment.

Ensuring that rail is built on time and on budget will be key to helping us do all of this.

And so, we will be holding the City's feet to the fire and closely scrutinizing its request to extend

the GET tax for rail.

Agriculture

Last year, GMO's became one of the most controversial topics of the session. The issue will not go away and will require the same bold action that I asked from you earlier. Leaving it to the courts will not resolve the stalemate that has paralyzed us on this issue.

Whether you're trusting science or your own conscience, GMOs are not just about locally grown foods. They are a fact of modern life throughout the nation and the world. And nothing we do in Hawaii will change that.

So the discussion should not be about permitting or banning GMOs.

Rather we should be discussing how to facilitate choice and an open market, allowing us to individually decide whether we want to consume GMO products or not.

I believe that's an issue we can tackle with a good chance of success.

Safety

Moving into the future means making sure we have a safe place for our children and families by strengthening our gun control laws and curbing domestic violence.

Providing safe communities includes having an adequate prison system. OCCC is an outdated and misplaced facility that needs to be reassessed.

There is thought that we can lease the land under which it sits and use the money to expand and upgrade the Halawa facility. We should investigate that option, as well as others including upgrading Maui's prison.

In addition, we should look at broader reforms to reduce prison populations and make Hawaii's prison system more efficient. The recommendations outlined in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative done in 2012 is a good starting point.

It's about aloha

Finally, moving into the future means remembering who we are and what makes us who we are in Hawaii. As you all know, our perspective and focus of attention in this building are usually fairly broad.

It's not so much about the other guy, but about all of us as a community and a state.

It's about our sense of aloha, our common direction and our collective destination.

It's about how we can get there without leaving anyone behind.

I look forward to working with all of you in the coming session. I look forward to taking advantage of what has always been Hawaii's greatest strength—our diversity of people and of ideas—to forge one bright future.

And I look forward to letting the rhetoric settle, rolling up our sleeves and getting down to work in workman-like fashion.

Mahalo and aloha.

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