



The Senate

STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

Senate Minority Leader Sam Slom
Opening Day Remarks
28th Legislature
January 20, 2016

Thank you, Mr. President, and aloha, everyone. Mr. President, thank you for your poignant and candid remarks. We'd also like to acknowledge and thank our many men and women of the armed forces – and particularly, our hearts go out for our 12 missing Marines and for our colleague, Senator Kahele: always a Marine, never an ex-Marine. Our distinguished guests, the overburdened taxpayers of Hawai'i, on behalf of the entire Senate Minority, I wish you aloha.

And now, for the rest of the story.

Looking around, Mr. President, I am saddened that we didn't allow more people to join us in our opening every year; no amount of public celebration should reduce our resolve to work on this day. But this recent biennium tradition of curtailing festivities in the even year limits the number of taxpayers from being with us in the people's capitol. And I hope we eliminate this tradition in the near future.

So what should be the goal for the election-year 2016 legislative session? The Senate Minority's point of view can be summed up in a single word: **accountability**. The Legislature must be more accountable for unfulfilled promises, wasted tax money, poorly written contracts, and unenforceable legislation. The Legislature is accountable for failing to penalize poor performance by government and/or excusing individual bad or corrupt behavior.

We are honored to represent the people of Hawai'i and to be part of the state Senate and to earn your trust and respect, but we must do a better job of oversight, especially fiscal oversight. Billions of taxpayer dollars have been wasted on our watch because we haven't held government agencies accountable for delays, waste, and mismanagement.

Our \$28 billion biennial operating budget is bloated and in deficit. So, too, is our \$15 billion share of the \$28 billion unfunded liability. The Senate Minority sponsors the Hawaii Open Budget so you can see the budgets for yourself. We also sponsor an annual Alternative Operating Budget: our suggestions on how to trim the fat, pay down the debt, and restore the fiscal health of our government.

While we *talk* of change, we don't seem to change. Problems of a decade ago – or even longer – still are problems today: back-breaking taxes, homelessness, the high cost of living, diminishing economic diversity, replacing our aging infrastructure, and cooling our classrooms, among others.

We seem to be out of touch with reality, making it increasingly difficult to speak out against the cause of problems in Hawai'i and to call for change. Yet this must be done. How? Simply stated, we must do a much better job not of making new promises, but of making good on old ones.

Our job is to restore and encourage the public's confidence in our process, and to be more transparent and accountable ourselves while empowering our citizens. We have to do more than simply make speeches; we need appropriate action. We *can* do this; we *must* do this.

The public feels disconnected because we haven't done the best that we can do.

Your Senate Minority continues to believe that Hawai'i's economy has *not* turned around despite selected employment and tax data, and that too many of our citizens and small businesses continue to struggle needlessly.

Hawai'i is perceived as being hostile to business. We do have a state agency, the Department of Business and Economic Development, but now it's operating as the Department of Business, Economic Development, Tourism, Housing, Energy, Aerospace, Film, Art, Loans, and Climate Change. There is no focused business advocate in our state government.

How many promises have already been broken, and are yet to be broken, on the off-schedule, off-budget, originally \$2.7 billion (and now nearly \$7 billion) O'ahu rail transit boondoggle? The Legislature made this never-ending drain on taxes possible and is an enabler to the biggest and worst public project in Hawai'i's history. There is no accountability, while roads, sewers, and water delivery continue to break down.

The Public Utilities Commission will shortly rule on the \$4.3 billion takeover of Hawaiian Electric by Florida-based NextEra. As hard as we try, Mr. President, we cannot find significant benefits for Hawai'i ratepayers from this action, just more non-competitive monopoly.

As we have said in the past, the Hawai'i Health Connector wasted more than \$150 million without improving health care. We can do better. Millions more are now being spent on the ended Health Connector in transition, but it should receive no more state taxpayer funds.

And we must continue to be compassionate, but not foolish, in helping the truly needy while dealing firmly with those who prey on others and game the system. Stopping fraud is the key to this.

We must increase our local residents' standard of living by reducing their burdensome costs. We begin by eliminating the GET on food and medicine.

And we must promise no new taxes! We need to call for federal affordable cargo reform of the Jones Act, joining with like-minded legislators in Alaska, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

Your Senate Minority offers a thoughtful, effective five-point Action Agenda for 2016, including accountability for millions of dollars the state intends to spend on technology upgrades and modernization.

So, Mr. President, on behalf of the Senate Minority, I pledge continued efforts to support good legislation, regardless of who introduces it; to examine and report honestly on the financial and policy impact of all bills; and to work toward ending legislative exemptions for ourselves on laws that we pass on to others.

We celebrate our God-given liberty and our ability to change. We seek a '**Better Day.**' And working for a brighter, better future for Hawai'i is not a partisan issue. Together, we must navigate a smarter course with a vision of how much greater Hawai'i can be.

God bless Hawai'i, our armed forces, and the United States of America. Aloha!