

Concerns for the future of the Hawaii

This morning, I speak to you as just one of the fifty-one members of this legislative body—a father of two sons who represents a district where people continue a mounting struggle with the cost of living.

As I listen to these people, I realize how truly they share a deep concern for the future of our state. We must recognize their thirst for change.

In a little over ten months, we will face the voters, the people of our districts who have given us their trust. We may see the election of the first woman to hold the nation's highest office. We may also witness the day when a native son of Hawaii is chosen as leader of the free world.

This is not because things are changing, but because we are changing.

Imagine a woman who breaks through the “glass ceiling” to take a seat in the Oval Office. On November 4th, we could break that barrier. Imagine a man of color winning a state with under three-percent black population. Two weeks ago, we broke that barrier.

These events remind us of a hard truth: the forces of change will overwhelm the status quo. The way things are is not the way they will be.

You may be surprised to hear me say that. I have sometimes been accused of representing the “old boy's club.” People, who say that, don't really know me.

I believe in my heart and with my whole being we can make Hawaii a better place. To do that, we must embrace change, not as a political slogan, but as a way of life.

A call for Hawaii to take charge of its own destiny

That's why today, I am asking you, as representatives of the people of Hawaii, to help us take charge of our own destiny.

It is not my intention to offend anyone here today when I say that we are too complacent, too focused on our own individual concerns, and too accepting of the way things are. Forces beyond our state's control will work against our shared beliefs if we do not act.

Maybe you don't agree with me. Well, as a wise old Senator once put it, "you are entitled to your own opinion, but you are not entitled to your own facts."

We are thousands of miles away from the resources necessary to support the lives of well over a million people. So we must significantly increase our efforts to achieve greater sustainability. Our commitment to that effort will truly help Hawaii take charge of its destiny.

Lessons from the Superferry controversy

Less than three months ago, this body was called into special session to decide whether the Superferry would sink or float.

Dozens of protestors jumped into Nawiliwili harbor to keep the vessel and her passengers from coming ashore. The governor was booed when she came to Kauai to help settle the dispute. Newspapers around the world were running front-page stories about the trouble.

This is not the time to reopen that debate, but it is the time to recognize this is not the way to solve Hawaii's problems. Confrontation may bring temporary satisfaction to a few, but it will never bring long-term solutions for the many.

Balancing environmental and economic concerns

The Superferry debate raised important issues, but the right choice for Hawaii is to find a balance between our environmental and economic concerns, a balance that is sustainable. To take charge of our own destiny, we must recognize that good environmental policy and a sound economy should work together.

This is the middle road we can find between the unworkable extremes of no development and uncontrollable development. This middle way recognizes that a sustainable economy must first be built within a sustainable environment.

Hawaii's energy dependency and rising fuel costs

So let me begin with what I believe is our most pressing environmental and economic concern—our total dependence on imported fossil fuels—fuels that cost us more and more each day.

The increase in their price shows up in the gas we buy, the electricity we use, and the food we eat. Last year at this time, the price of oil was just under 50-dollars a barrel. Earlier this month that price had doubled.

Hawaii is not far away from a day when the cost of jet fuel will start to play havoc with our tourist-based economy. Some say it has already started to do that.

You can be sure that many of our families are struggling with rising gas prices.

Why are we moving so slowly? Most of the energy we need can be created here at home. Are the threats to the status quo and the increasing appetites of real estate developers standing in our way?

Renewing a call for energy self-sufficiency

Hawaii's unique environment presents us with an unparalleled opportunity to lead our nation in the development of renewable energies. Consider a few possibilities:

Ethanol from sugarcane is more than five times as energy efficient as ethanol produced from corn, and it significantly reduces green house gas emissions.

I realize there are considerable challenges surrounding the increased production of sugarcane and other bio-fuel crops. Issues of water rights and infrastructure; issues that will require us to change our land use policies. But wouldn't most of us rather gaze at a sugarcane field that helps power our cars, than a field of high-rise condos built for the offshore rich.

Leeward Oahu, Molokai, Lanai and western Maui have some of the best solar energy resources in the nation. And yet we have hardly begun to tap their potential.

The U.S. Department of Energy says Hawaii has wind resources consistent with utility-scale production. Every single one of our islands has potential for generating power from wind.

Lanai and Maui already have a start, but there is much we can do to accelerate the permitting of renewable energy development.

Kauai is the wettest spot on Earth and yet we have done almost nothing to develop hydropower as a potential resource. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that Kauai has hydropower resources equal to about 70-percent of its electricity needs.

Wave energy development lies just over the horizon. We sure have plenty of waves just waiting for that day.

Local renewable energy development requires significant changes

Let me be candid with you, too many of us in this chamber cling to the status quo.

All of these alternative energies will require big changes: changes in how we view our landscapes, changes in state support levels, and changes in our willingness to be energy efficient and conserve energy.

In the end, achieving better energy efficiency and practicing conservation are the two most immediate ways we can decrease our dependence on outside resources.

If we could just produce half of Hawaii's energy, we would add at least two billion dollars to the state's economy. And the money stays here, not in a bank somewhere in Texas or the Middle East. This is how we will begin to take charge of our own destiny.

UH professors provide a symbol of what can be done

Members, the plant on your desks is a symbol of what we can do. The pot for that plant contains a charcoal additive that has been granted a U.S. patent for

its unique properties. The charcoal acts to improve soil fertility, and it also has significant potential as an alternative fuel. It is made from green waste and has the potential for wide-scale commercial use.

The man who developed this technology is here with us today. Michael Antal, distinguished professor of renewable energy resources, from the UH School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology, and his wife, Ann.

We also recognize Goro Uehara, from the university's Department of Tropical Plant and Soil Sciences, who is working with Dr. Antal to develop agricultural applications for his patented process.

These two men are helping invent our future, and grow a sustainable economy here in Hawaii.

Including Hawaii's next generation in decision making

Members, if Hawaii is to take charge of its own destiny, we must take a closer look at another change we will need to make.

The young adults of this state have virtually no seat at the table where the real decisions are made. This is wrong and it works to our disadvantage.

Generation X is now entering its late thirties and early forties. Members of this generation founded Google, Yahoo, MySpace, Dell, and YouTube. Those are billion-dollar tech companies. Should we expect less of those who follow from Generation Y?

We will never know unless we open up our institutions, our committees and boardrooms, to provide the kind of access to leadership these young people deserve. The decisions we are making now will define their future. It is our duty and responsibility to give them a say in that future.

A call to fix unsatisfactory facilities at UH

All of us are saddened by the decision of UH football coach, June Jones, to leave Hawaii. We wish him well. Regrettably, his departure draws attention to a badly neglected problem at the university: the deplorable condition of many of its facilities.

Lack of adequate attention to this problem is leading many of the best faculty members at the university to consider leaving. We cannot allow this to happen.

Regardless of the tough budget problems we face this year, we must find the money to help the university deal with this crisis. I promise you, on behalf of the fifty-one members of this chamber, we will do our share.

Stand and join us now, as a symbol of our commitment to achieve this goal, and in recognition of the many outstanding works UH has achieved in its first 100 years.

A local newspaperman forecasts a future for Hawaii

A Honolulu newspaperman known as A. A. Bud Smyser wrote a report entitled, "Hawaii's Future in the Pacific." Let me read you part of what he said:

"Unless growth is carefully paced, increased activity will bring with it the threat of environmental overload—destruction of view planes and beauty; air, water and noise pollution; straining transportation and utility services beyond their capacities; crowding of beaches, parks and other public facilities."

"These developments in turn, could impose heavy corrective costs on the tax-paying public. Serious overcrowding issues already exist in many parts of Hawaii."

Smyser wrote those words, 20 years ago.

Members of the House, we have crossed the threshold of Smyser's prediction and we must act now to save the Hawaii we know and love.