

Honolulu City Council Inauguration
January 2, 2009
Message From the Chair
Chair Todd K. Apo

Governor Lingle, Mayor Hannemann, Mayor Carvalho, Major General Vern Miyagi, Hawaii Councilmember Naole and Yagong, representatives from Senator Inouye and Representative Abercrombie's offices, and to all of our special guests here today, Aloha. Thank you for joining us today at our inauguration.

A little over four and a half years ago, I was telling people that I had no desire to run to political office nor fill the vacancy being left by my predecessor. Over a short period of time, after examining what lay ahead for the growing West Oahu and for our entire island, I made a commitment to not only run for office, but more importantly, a commitment to serve. Today, I have the privilege to stand here before all of you as the Chair of our Council, and talk about where I hope we all, together, can lead our City over the next four years.

We all understand what we are facing in the coming year, and like others call on the collaborative effort of the Council, Mayor Hannemann, Governor Lingle and their respective administrations, the State Legislature, and the private business sector to work in concert for our future. It will be one of my focuses, as Council Chair, to help create an environment so that this body plays a collaborative role in setting forth a path for our future.

Let me start by stating the obvious, we have a tough road ahead of us. Balancing our current economic situation with the need to provide basic city services will be no easy task. We must focus on a positive future, but in doing so, we must not ignore the issues before us. Just before Christmas, I got home and my family was watching the end of the movie, An American President. Never one to ignore a good movie quote, I heard President Andrew Sheppard say, "We have serious problems to solve, and we need serious people to solve them." That's not too far off of where we are today.

With that thought, I start with a message to my fellow Council members. Unlike the Governor or Mayor, I can't stand here and tell you exactly what we are going to do – I'm not the coach of this team. For now, I am serving as the team captain. That means I have the honor of speaking for the team and providing leadership to our team. The bottom line, however, is that I am just one of a nine member team. With that structure, I hope to provide some words on what I hope our framework will be going forward.

Our goal, collectively and individually, must be for the betterment of the City and County of Honolulu. That in no way means being in total agreement all the time. That does, however, mean recognizing and understanding our role as law makers and policy makers for our City. We are a unique and diverse team, and as Councilmember Dela Cruz pointed out to me early in my political career, we are a team that needs to work together despite the fact that we didn't get to pick our teammates. We hold a job that is by no

means short of issues and problems to solve—solid waste, waste water, transit, affordable housing, development plans, sustainability and land preservation...just to name a few. I have come to appreciate the service role we have chosen – especially by those like Councilmember Okino who has provided a lifetime of service to the City first as a planner and then on this Council, and Councilmembers Tam and Cachola who have served both in the State Legislature and this Council.

The public deserves a Council that is stable, understandable, and that provides a level of collaboration and leadership in its law making and policy setting. Our working relationship with the Mayor and his administration will remain respectful and respected, with a clear understanding of the level of independence that is expected between these two branches of City government. While we must respect the Administration's role in operating this City, we will likewise ask that the Administration respect our role in setting policy and laws as the framework for their efforts. Together, there is great opportunity to lead our City through today's economic times.

I know there are two issues many are expecting to hear talked about today and the days ahead – the economy and a mass transit project.

The Economy. As to the economy, my main message and objective is to recognize the opportunities that exist in economic downturns and to pose the challenge to us to create an environment for success. Our first two priorities must be to maintain our core government services, especially public safety and welfare roles, and second to provide a stable foundation to build upon. As Major Hannemann has stated, our island is home to three-fourths of our state's population. Our opportunity and duty to do things right will have statewide impacts. Upon insuring those first two priorities, we must turn to addressing the longer term viability of our island communities and cultures. I continue to believe that City government has the tools to create incentive to produce much needed benefits, without major cash expenditures.

Economically, we are in a time when it is better to be constructing and renovating than it is to be operating. However, we are also at a time when it is difficult to obtain the funding commitment for such construction. The challenge for us is to determine how City Government can help the situation. Provide incentives and an environment to keep projects going, businesses operating and people employed. We as City Government have to show that "we get it." Not just in our words, but in our actions. In the laws we create at Council, the budgets we set, and the way in which the Administration implements and operates City Government must have that end in mind. Failed action, including inaction, will only serve to prolong the economic downturn we face today. Let's not dwell on where we are – we can't avoid it. Instead, let's focus on the tools to take advantage of the opportunities before us to work our way back to economic prosperity as quickly as possible.

Mass Transit. Mass transit ... Yes, I will ride it. My third-grade son begs for a new route that goes directly from Kapolei to Kamehameha Schools. I've told him that the airport comes first. I have now spent four years in due diligence on this project and feel like I

could teach a year-long college course on this project. Hopefully without objection from the Mayor, I'd like to run analysis of this project through his three-part test.

Do we need it? Yes – if you expect West Oahu to continue to shoulder the growth of Oahu's future, we must provide this kind of major infrastructure for its future. Just last year, the Council took action on the continued development of the City of Kapolei, the UH West Oahu campus, and the Kroc Community Center. While all of these will help alleviate the need to travel into downtown, the reality is that the transportation corridor between West Oahu and the urban core will always be a heavily used necessity.

Can we afford it? Granted, we will never have a consensus on this one. However, I do believe we *can* afford the development, operation and maintenance of the system. The Council took an important step in 2006 when it prohibited the use of general fund, real property taxes, for the system's development. The general excise tax surcharge, which is paid partially by our island's visitors, will provide the bulk of the development funds. As we seek significant federal funds, look at the positive landscape. We have an incoming President with strong Hawaii ties, who understands our needs, a senior Senator who chairs the Senate appropriations committee, and a congressional team well-positioned for our State. As Councilmember Garcia and I have met with the Federal Transportation Administration in DC, we know that the FTA believes we have a good and needed project. Finally, we have a country in need of economic invigoration through greater federal dollars for public infrastructure to insure jobs and to strengthen the countries future through improved roads, bridges and mass transit. The federal government is poised to pour a billion dollars into our local economy. It is unlikely that we will ever be in a better position to afford this infrastructure project.

Finally, can we maintain it? Another admission, it won't be cheap. But in examining mass transit systems nationwide, the reality is that maintaining and operating a rail based system is in fact cheaper than operating a pure bus system. Just as we have and always will find a way to maintain and operate our bus system today, we will be able to do so for rail.

But here's the more important message on rail. Given the vote that took place in November, our collective effort must now turn to making sure the project is done correctly, in the best way possible. It's a point that two people with differing views of the project, like Councilmember Djou and myself, can in fact agree on. We must built it right, and we must set up a system to provide the most cost effective operations possible. We must avoid efforts that will only cost the project more money and further delay its implementation. A successful project, done right, will provide great benefits for our island, long into the future. That long term horizon must guide our efforts.

Sustainability. Third, I'd like to speak briefly about our island's sustainability – mainly, energy independence and maintaining open space. Our role as City Government must be to create an environment for alternative energy solutions to prosper. Whether it's H- Power expansion, new waste to energy technologies, wind and solar energy, or finding ways to encourage hybrid and electric cars, our isolation and compact space provides us

with opportunity to be a City of industry leaders. Our efforts to implement the use of the Clean Water and Natural Lands Fund to insure the preservation of open space and public access will be an important step for our island's long-term future. These issues, while perhaps not at the top of public headlines, must continue to be a focus of our efforts. A key part of sustainability will be development. Perhaps a counterintuitive statement on its face, but the opportunities of Transit-Oriented Development, providing for density expansion in the appropriate places like our urban core and second city, while "keeping the country, country," and providing incentive for redevelopment of areas into energy efficient LEEDS standard buildings will go a long way towards our island's sustainability goals. This is a message that has, perhaps, been lost in the debates about the rail project – rail is more than a transportation solution. It will help shape the way we live, work and play for decades. The development of the rail system accentuates the need for proper planning of our island's landscape.

Solid Waste. Finally, who wouldn't expect me to take this opportunity to address our solid waste issue. It's another issue that I have studied for a long time. I hope this Council will continue to push for the City to live up to its promise it made in 2003 that Waimanalo Gulch be closed. Yet, we don't need to move the landfill to any other community. With the expansion of H-Power, the short-term exportation of waste, and the continued development of new technologies, we can handle all of the waste without dumping it into the ground. This is obviously a solution that we have not *yet* been able to convince the Mayor to undertake – but we'll keep working on that. We must cease the efforts to further expand Waimanalo Gulch. Our land-based resources are limited. We have solutions that will eliminate the need to scar more of our island by putting waste into the ground. We must put ourselves on a path towards truly implementing those solutions.

As many of you know, one of my avocations outside of these walls is my efforts as a referee on the basketball court. I continue to be amazed at the parallels between basketball officiating and City Counciling. Going into a basketball game, I prepare myself to work hard with a focus on what is right, regardless of who's playing the game. But I go out onto the court knowing that with each call I make, there will be at least a part of the crowd that's unhappy with the call. That there will be some coaches that are easy to deal with and others who simply won't be – but understanding that what they are doing is grounded in a passion for their position – their schools and their players. That there will be some easy calls that you could make from the 40th row, and some messy plays that will distinguish the top officials from the mediocre. And with all of that, I walk out onto the court with a presentation of confidence along with a strong dose of humility, knowing that even with the best preparation and effort, I am still likely to miss a call or two. I bring all of that into my role here – representing my district, working for the island, and now, as the chair of this body. It's about a commitment to serve – about playing a role, at times taking control of that game, about being a part of a team whose goal is to facilitate and provide an environment for the betterment for the entire game. For now, I hope to provide some leadership and confidence to our body.

In closing, I want to welcome Councilmember Bainum back to the City Council team. I also want to thank and acknowledge Councilmember Ann Kobayashi for her many years of public service. Congratulations also to Prosecuting Attorney Peter Carlisle, Mayor Hannemann who were also sworn in today.

We stand at a time facing serious problems to solve. This adversity always provides great potential. I look forward to being a part of the solution. Taking the right ideas and putting them into action. Changing from a business as usual model to an effort for success.

On behalf of the Council, I thank you all for being here with us today and, with much ahead of all of us, we wish you the very best in 2009. Aloha.