

Transcript of 2006 gubernatorial inaugural speech by Governor Linda Lingle, delivered on December 4, 2006. Transcribed from the Honolulu Star-Bulletin (12/02/2002) by Perry Arrasmith, 2022, under the auspices of the School of Communication & Information, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

The 2002 Inaugural Address of Linda Lingle December 2, 2002

Aloha and thank you for being here with me today.

It is a great honor to stand before you as your governor. I am humbled by the trust that you have placed in me, and I am determined never to betray that trust.

Before sharing some thoughts about our New Beginning, I want to acknowledge some people who are here today. (Recognizes dignitaries and family)

There are other people who could not be here today, who are also on my mind and in my heart.

First, there are the state's dedicated public school teachers and their students who are busy teaching and learning in classrooms across the state. Their efforts give meaning to the challenges that lie ahead.

Our educational challenge is easy to define, and we must make it a reality.

We must provide all children a learning environment that is safe—free from bullying and drugs. Teachers must have the supplies and equipment necessary to do their jobs. Every teacher needs to be knowledgeable in the subject they are teaching. And parents must be assured that, at a minimum, their children are learning the basics.

I particularly want to mention those courageous parents and teachers who have worked so hard to establish charter schools in Hawaii. These pioneers have overcome numerous obstacles in their quest to provide meaningful choices within the public school system.

I also want to address our state workers. I have committed not to lay off any current workers, but I have also promised the public that we will do things in new ways that deliver better services with a better attitude. And, just as I will live up to my promise to you, so must I deliver on my promise to the public. Working together, I know that we can earn the public's respect and make government service a source of great pride.

It's an amazing thing when you think about it. Those of us lucky enough to work for the government actually get paid to help people. We honor our families and ourselves by serving the public selflessly.

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I also want to acknowledge the many citizens of this state who work in the not-for-profit sector of our community. You and the people whose lives you enrich through your tireless efforts have a special place in my heart.

There needs to be a vital relationship between government and the not-for-profit community. No one in this state has a more important job than you do.

Finally, I want to acknowledge those who will always consider Hawaii their home, but who have felt compelled for financial reasons to live elsewhere.

I've spoken with many of you as I've traveled on the mainland, and I've spoken with your families here at home.

Please know that you are missed. Our state needs your talents, expertise and participation in crafting a future filled with renewed opportunity and hope.

I want you to have a meaningful choice to come home, and I will do my best to make that happen.

In my Agenda for a New Beginning I provided a roadmap for accomplishing that, and more.

The success of our journey together requires that we accomplish three specific goals. We must (1) restore integrity to government, (2) expand and diversify the economy, and (3) improve public education.

Too often in Hawaii, the first order of business for the newly elected has been to sort people into two categories: political supporters and everyone else.

People in the first category often received favorable treatment.

People in the second category received what they perceived to be retribution for supporting the "wrong" candidate.

This kind of "help your friends, hurt your enemies" thinking has damaged our state's reputation and ability to thrive. It must stop. It will stop.

A New Beginning means zero tolerance for political rewards and retribution. It means that people who campaigned against us are also invited to join Lieutenant Governor Aiona and me in serving the people of Hawaii to the best of our abilities.

These are not just words. We welcome everyone's ideas. We need to hear everyone's concerns.

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We need your competence, your experience, your passion to serve the public. It does not matter whose campaign you might have worked on, which political party you may belong to, or how you voted.

Sorting people into political friends and enemies, or insiders and outsiders, has created a culture of mediocrity by discouraging public debate and excluding people who might otherwise contribute. Who you know became more important than what you know.

As of this moment, anyone who cares about Hawaii and wants to contribute is a friend of this administration.

A New Beginning also means that financial experts will get the facts about the state's fiscal condition, and then explain it simply and clearly.

It is, after all, your money that pays for government. You have a right to know exactly how it is being spent and what you are getting for it.

Only with accurate and understandable financial information, can we set realistic objectives and priorities.

These are not easy times for state governments around the country. Hawaii is not the only state faced with a huge fiscal challenge.

Two weeks ago at a meeting attended by 43 governors from around the country, the discussion of budgets was so grim that a governor who had just won a close race joked that he was thinking about demanding a recount.

I know it won't be easy to both balance the budget and begin work on our Agenda for a New Beginning, but that is exactly what we are going to do. The greater the challenge, the greater our resolve must be.

One of the many ways that we will succeed is by making sure state and county government work together as never before.

I will reach out to Mayor Harris, Mayor Kim, Mayor Baptiste and Mayor-elect Arakawa during my first days as your governor, and together we will identify areas of overlap and redundancy in state and county government that impede delivery of services to the public, and increase costs. Then we'll decide together how best to resolve these inefficiencies.

I am confident that all four of them will work with me without rancor or political maneuvering.

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They recognize, as do I, the need for government leaders to care less about control and power, and more about what is best for all the people of Hawaii. The people demand no less, and they deserve no less.

A New Beginning means that Hawaii must honor its commitments to Native Hawaiians. We cannot truly move forward as a state until we resolve the issues and promises of our past.

With guidance from the Hawaiian community, I will work with our congressional delegation to enlighten our nation's leaders about the critical need for federal recognition.

And we will resolve the ceded lands issue once and for all.

It is time for everyone in our state to participate fully in planning Hawaii's future. This will happen only after these long-standing, basic issues have been justly resolved.

It is also time to honor commitments made by our federal government to Filipino war veterans who served our country so courageously in World War II. Patience may be a virtue in some situations, but half a century is far too long to deny promised benefits to these valiant men.

A New Beginning means the citizens of Hawaii will have access to more information about government and how it works than ever before.

I welcome public discussion and even intense scrutiny of my administration's ideas and actions.

I will open up government by making it easier to gain access to information.

Government contracts will be awarded openly and strictly on their merits.

You have a right to know how such decisions get made. It's not my money, and it's not the money of the state workers who make such decisions. It's your money and you have an inalienable right to see for yourself how it's being spent.

A New Beginning also means that government respects the role of business in our state.

Government in Hawaii has often treated business like "bad guys," as if the goal of every businessperson is to get rich by taking advantage of the "little guys." This kind of thinking is not only counterproductive, it's just plain wrong.

The bulk of taxes in Hawaii is paid by businesses and their employees. And most jobs in Hawaii can be traced to businesses, most of which are relatively small, operating on a tight profit margin at great risk to the business owners.

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In many cases, these are family-owned businesses driven as much by tradition and pride as by the need to make a profit. But even big corporations deserve our appreciation. They provide good jobs and pay taxes too. It's time that we recognized that profit is not a dirty word.

Government does not generate wealth. Businesses do that. And they do it while seeking to earn a profit.

No one in Hawaii can thrive—including state workers—when business is not doing well. And it is not easy to survive in business. It takes hard work, discipline and a can-do attitude. It also takes a government that sees successful businesses as an important part of being able to create a higher quality of life for all the people of Hawaii.

State government in Hawaii has long been heavy-handed, trying to control every aspect of the economy. This has given our state an anti-business reputation that has scared away investors and entrepreneurs. I am determined to change this image.

The “open for business” sign has now been turned on and the welcome mat is out to anyone willing to support our efforts to strengthen and diversify Hawaii's economy while honoring our island traditions and protecting our fragile environment.

A New Beginning also means that it is time to end one-party politics. It doesn't matter which party is in control—Republican or Democrat. Without checks and balances, even the best of intentions are not enough.

We all know from experience that one-party systems don't tolerate questions, debates, or scrutiny. Sooner or later, one-party systems become secretive and self-protective, and they lose the confidence of the people they serve.

We need at least two vibrant political parties to maintain the checks and balances of a true democracy. That, too, is what a New Beginning is all about.

To my Democrat friends in the state Legislature: We must remember that people expect us to work together, and to do what is best for them. They will not, and should not tolerate excessive partisanship or bickering.

I pledge to work shoulder-to-shoulder with you, and to support your ideas based on merit and not on party affiliation.

A good idea is a good idea, regardless of whose it might be. I look forward to sharing credit with you for the many good things that we can accomplish together for all the people of Hawaii.

As I stand here today talking about our future, I can't help but think about Hawaii's past. More specifically, I am thinking about the last woman to lead these islands.

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Queen Liliuokalani gave us a model for leadership that is needed in today's Hawaii, and, indeed, in today's world. The most important commitment that I can make to you is to embrace her lessons of courage, humility and aloha as my inspiration as we work together to restore integrity to government, expand and diversify our economy, and improve public education.

We can do this. We will do this. We must do this.

We owe it to those who have gone before us, we owe it to ourselves, and we owe it to future generations.

The challenges are great, but the opportunities are even greater. Working together, our future is bright and anything is possible. Please join me in this New Beginning for all the people of Hawaii. Let's do it together!

Mahalo, malama pono and aloha.
