

Speeches and messages: 1974 (2 of 2): State Democratic convention

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers

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news from

Senator DANIEL K. INOUE

topic: Speech before the State Democratic Convention

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Twenty years ago some 100 new democrats, most of them in their twenties and thirties, offered themselves as candidates for County and territorial positions. They did so largely in response to the enthusiasm generated by a former Honolulu police captain, John A. Burns. The 1954 election is now history, but the lessons of that election are relevant today.

Some have described the results of that 1954 election as a political upheaval. Others as an avalanche. Still others referred to it as a revolution. Whatever the proper description, that election marked for the first time in the history of Hawaii the assumption of control of the legislative bodies throughout our Islands by the representatives of our Democratic Party.

I could spend many minutes here recounting the names of those who participated in that "revolution by ballot". I could spend hours recounting their contributions and subsequent achievements. Some are now judges or in the State House or Senate. One is a mayor and two are members of the United States Congress.

I was one of those privileged to participate in that revolution.

As a group we were full of ideas and filled with idealism. All of us were also very impatient. We wanted to remake society in Hawaii. We wanted to provide for many who had up to then lacked any opportunity to play an equal and meaningful part in the government and life of our Islands a decent chance to share fully in the economic activity and in the political life of Hawaii. In many ways I think we succeeded.

Since 1954, Hawaii has prospered. Government services have improved in both quantity and quality. The educational opportunities for our children have noticeably improved. The University of Hawaii has been lifted from a small and somewhat obscure campus to a first rate and massive educational conglomerate including community colleges throughout our state with a total enrollment of some 52,108 students. The faculty includes many of national and even international renown. It contains a medical school, a law school and other programs which were but distant dreams twenty years ago.

With each success we have, however, been confronted with new problems; problems of congestion, environment, inadequate housing, welfare, inflation, and crime. The problems seem never ending. In this non-utopian world I fear they ever will. But it can be said with honesty that we have tried and to a remarkable degree we have succeeded in solving, what has been, the most pressing problems in our state during these past two decades.

On this twentieth anniversary we honor our truly great leader and in so doing express our eternal gratitude for his leadership for more than two decades. We also note with sadness that after three unprecedented terms as our governor he has decided to step down and retire from the amphitheater of elective governmental leadership.

The forthcoming elections of 1974 will have a sense of emptiness without Jack Burns leading the battle. It is with great sadness that we acknowledge his wish for we know that his qualities of leadership will be much missed. It will be many aeons before Hawaii sees another Jack Burns.

If we are to be worthy of our past we must look and plan to the future, however. I have noted that some look forward to 1974 with expectations of extraordinary success. They feel, I fear, that that the problems of the President and of the opposition party will make this a great year for Democrats. Some are already preparing their victory statements.

As one who has viewed the political scene from more than two decades in politics, let me leave you with a word of caution. This is not destined to be a great year for Democrats, or even a good year for politicians of whatever party. It is the year of frustration and anger and voter disillusionment with politicians. Numerous studies demonstrate that as of the present, the voters of the nation and Hawaii will display that disaffection at the polls.

I, therefore, look to November with some sense of foreboding and concern. I do so, not only because of the popular anger and disgust with much of the national political scene, but also because of certain words I have heard too often by people in describing our Democratic Party here in Hawaii.

One of these words is "arrogant". Another is "unresponsive". Although I do not believe we are deserving of these adjectives there are, I fear, many in Hawaii who do.

I know it would be much more comforting to hear a recounting of our great achievements and our proud history and promises of even greater victories to come. If we are to achieve such future victories we must, however, be very aware of our weaknesses. We must not only be aware of them, we must do something about them.

For starters we must recognize forthrightly that the political infighting, which we seem to wage with such relish, will not help us. A contest for new leadership is a necessary part of the renewal process for our political party, but it must be one based on competing programs, priorities, and records of performance, not on personalities. I just hope that the harsh rhetoric being exchanged on occasion will not reach suicidal proportions.

Second, it will be well for those who seek public office to voluntarily make public disclosure of their political and personal finances. Even though the law may not require it, the people have seen enough to expect and demand it. It will not be enough in 1974 for a man seeking the confidence and support of the voter to declare "I am not a crook". Despite our knowledge to the contrary many people believe politicians are all a bunch of crooks. Voluntary and full disclosure is a healthy first step in regaining that essential voter confidence in government.

I am, therefore, presently preparing for release, not just my tax returns but a full audited account of my assets, liabilities, and net worth.

We must also be willing to disclose the amount and source of all our campaign contributions. As you know, I have been doing that.

Third, and while it has been so often said that it may seem trite to repeat it, we must open our Party to new Democrats for participation at every level--as candidates, as precinct workers and as policy makers. We cannot experience the necessary revitalization and reinvigoration of our party without such new participation.

Fourth, and finally after these twenty years of leadership responsibility I believe it is essential that we recognize the need to once again infuse our party with an idealism worthy of our democratic heritage. If we are to be honest with ourselves we must admit that we have too often become a party emphasizing the personalities of sometimes competing leaders rather than a party dedicated to common ideals and goals.

This twentieth anniversary of our Party's ascension to power and influence is an occasion for rededication to the basic principles upon which our Party was founded.

If we are to be worthy of our past and deserving of the future we must remain faithful to the principle that government of the few and for the few has no place in our Party's platform.

We must assure once again that ours will be neither the party of the self-serving right or the self-righteous left; that it will be a party based upon ideals but with room for diversity of opinion.

We must rededicate ourselves to the maintenance of a living partnership between our elected officials and the people.

We must rededicate ourselves to a party based upon the character of our leadership--not on their charisma.

We must be a Party more concerned with performance than with P. R.

We must be a Party more concerned with ideology than with image.

We must be a Party more concerned with maintaining and improving our own standards than in condemning those of the opposition. We can take no solace from their distress.

1974--our twentieth anniversary--can and will be an important year, not only for Hawaii, but for our Party.

It is my fervent hope and goal that in the few months between now and election day we will be able to prepare ourselves and demonstrate to the people of our state once again that we are worthy of their trust and support. I pledge to you my full effort. I solicit your help.