



**EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
HONOLULU**

**50TH ANNIVERSARY OF STATEHOOD
JOINT LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

March 18, 2009

Remarks by Governor Linda Lingle

Senate President Hanabusa, Speaker Say, Chief Justice Moon, Lt. Governor and Mrs. Aiona, current legislators, Mrs. Quinn and Gregory Quinn, Judge Jim Burns, Emme Tomimbang and Dr. Sheenagh Burns, Governor and Mrs. Ariyoshi, Governor and Mrs. Waihe'e, Governor and Mrs. Cayetano, Members of Hawai'i's first state legislature in 1959, "50 Voices of Statehood" representatives, 50th Anniversary of Statehood Commissioners, and the people of Hawai'i

Good afternoon and aloha.

I am honored to be joined by former governors, legislators and other special guests to recognize this historic day on which President Dwight David Eisenhower signed the Hawai'i Admission Act.

President Eisenhower was an ardent supporter of Hawai'i's statehood. He would later say, "Years of effort have finally extended the boundaries of our beloved land far out into the Pacific to encircle the islands of Hawai'i."

With the stroke of a pen, President Eisenhower changed the landscape of our nation.

As our nation's 50th state, Hawai'i is the youngest member of the Union.

Our relatively young age is reflected today in the presence of Hawai‘i’s only six governors or their representatives since statehood. And what a privilege it was for me to stand with the governors and their families to have my picture taken.

Mahalo Mrs. Quinn, members of the Burns family and former governors, for joining the people of Hawai‘i in commemorating this special day.

The memories of Hawai‘i statehood remain vivid for all of Hawai‘i’s people. And the history remains fresh, fresher still after today, in all of our minds.

This is underscored by the unique “50 Voices of Statehood” audio and video anthology created by the 50th Anniversary of Statehood Commission. Each segment is filled with distinctive memories and personal perspectives on 1959 and Hawai‘i’s road to statehood.

I want to thank each of the “50 Voices” who are with us today, as well as those who will be part of the series in the months ahead.

I want to take a moment to mention Mrs. Ah Quon McElrath who was one of the 50 Voices of Statehood and also a dedicated and vocal member of the Statehood Commission. Although no longer with us, she remains in our hearts and minds. Her leadership and commitment to Hawai‘i and its people will never be forgotten.

It is also important to recognize the individuals who labored over the period of decades to make statehood possible. These include Joseph Farrington – a territorial senator and delegate to United States Congress; Samuel Wilder King – a territorial governor and delegate to United States Congress; Governor William Quinn and Governor John Burns.

Statehood was achieved through the dedication and perseverance of these great leaders, along with the people of Hawai‘i – who in 1959 voted 17 to one in support of statehood.

They voted for basic rights and privileges of American citizenship.

They voted to have a voice in Washington.

And, as Governor Ariyoshi said so well in his 50 Voices of Statehood piece, they voted for “control over our own destiny.”

In honoring the 50th anniversary of statehood, we are recognizing these leaders as well as the working men and women who were passionate in their conviction about what Hawai‘i’s future should look like.

What all residents shared then, and what we all share today, is a deep love of Hawai‘i. And this was also true for those who opposed statehood.

Hawai‘i is truly a place like no other!

EMBRACING OUR CONTRADICTIONS

Hawai‘i was and is in many ways a simple place with complex issues, and in many ways is defined by our contradictions.

We are isolated geographically, yet we serve as a vital bridge between the mainland United States and Asia-Pacific region.

As a state we are young, yet we are also home to an ancient and proud host culture.

We are the most diverse state in the Union, yet a place where racial and ethnic lines are often blurred or deemed irrelevant.

Hawai'i is a place of breathtaking natural beauty, but also a world-class center of innovation and scientific discovery.

There are moments when living here is like living in the paradise we see depicted on travel posters and in the movies.

But, the Pacific Ocean's great expanse does not shield us from the challenges of everyday life.

It also doesn't drown out the differing opinions that exist in our community.

And, I am grateful that.

Our differences are our strength and they create the vibrant tapestry of our culture.

Statehood brought self-determination and federal dollars to our shores.

It conferred benefits of the most powerful and prosperous nation on Earth.

And, most importantly, it allowed our citizens to enjoy the rights enshrined in the United States Constitution.

Because of this, we can speak our minds freely.

We can have vigorous debate, which is the lifeblood of our democratic system and has served our nation well for more than 200 years.

We may not always agree, but we all have a voice, and are free to express our views.

STRUGGLE FOR STATEHOOD

Hawai‘i’s road to statehood began decades before 1959. It was a journey beset by many false starts and failed attempts, as it faced a very hesitant United States Congress.

But the people of Hawai‘i remained determined, hopeful and focused on their task at hand.

They refused to give up and ultimately they convinced Congress of the many ways in which Hawai‘i was a worthy and beneficial addition to the United States.

It is well known that Hawai‘i’s strategic importance was key to victory in the Pacific during World War II.

But the more resounding story coming out of the war was the bravery and the sacrifice exemplified by our Nisei soldiers in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the 100th Battalion and 500th Military Intelligence Service.

These soldiers showed that being loyal to the American cause was in no way defined by ethnicity. It was determined instead, by a belief in the principles of freedom and democracy.

Hawai‘i provided a model of tolerance ahead of its time.

The diversity of Hawai‘i’s people was touched on often in statehood testimonies before members of the United States Congress, including in 1935, when Territorial Senator Joseph Farrington said these words:

“To anyone who has lived in Hawai‘i, and has grown up with the boys and girls of other races, it is difficult to understand the suspicions in which they are held by some people... You come to judge people according to their character and not their race after you have lived with them a long time.”

Since becoming a state, Hawai‘i has contributed to the nation in more unexpected ways.

The forms of human expression unique to our islands, such as surfing, hula, our food, words, phrases and our music, have traveled well beyond our shores and ignited the world’s imagination.

Who could have imagined 50 years ago the degree to which Hawaiian culture would resonate with people of other states and countries.

We have also put our stamp on science.

Today, we are the site of ground-breaking discoveries in variety of fields, including marine research, genetics research and astronomy.

More recently, we have embarked on an ambitious plan to achieve a clean energy future, creating a model for other states and nations.

LOOKING BACK

When the United States House sent the bill to President Eisenhower granting Hawai‘i statehood, (on March 12, 1959), the effect 5,000 miles away was immediate.

As our local newspapers reported on that day – and so many of our residents still vividly remember – civil defense horns wailed, church bells pealed, ships’ whistles tooted, and motorists leaned on their horns.

That evening, there was dancing across the islands that would become America’s newest state and fireworks illuminated the sky over the Pacific.

If many people were joyful, it was because they had worked so hard to achieve this historic milestone. They had looked forward to seeing this day for decades.

It was a day that marked new opportunities – socially, economically and politically.

A headline in one of our local newspapers proclaimed that day, above pictures of diverse Hawai‘i residents, “First Class Citizens Now.”

This headline reaffirmed that on that special day, that while we were a place like no other... and a people like no other... we were all now citizens.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Now, on the 50th anniversary of statehood, Hawai‘i, the nation and the world face new challenges.

Each new day brings more challenging economic news, but also a wealth of new opportunities for the future.

In overcoming what is perhaps the biggest challenge Hawai‘i has faced since 1959, many of the same qualities shown in the struggle for statehood are needed today.

We must encourage the participation and collaboration of the entire community.

Our efforts must be characterized by determination and hard work.

We must embrace flexibility, and have the wisdom to adopt a new plan or strategy when the previous plan falls short.

Perhaps most importantly, we must have faith in the strength, resilience and pioneering spirit of Hawai'i's businesses, residents and leaders.

CLOSING

As Hawai'i's current governor, I will tell you that leading this state has and continues to be the greatest privilege and most humbling experience of my life.

I know the former governors here today feel the same; that it is an honor to lead Hawai'i, which is a place like no other and home to people who are unique in all the world.

Our collective history and experience in this House Chambers today offers an incredible reflection of who the people of Hawai'i are, and what they are capable of achieving.

Columnist Thomas Friedman, in the New York Times last month, pointed out that despite our nation's troubles, the world still looks to America to lead the way out of our current crisis.

In the Pacific region, it is up to us to provide that leadership and serve as an example to our neighbors.

We did that when we achieved statehood, standing as a model of democracy to Asian and Pacific nations.

We will do it again as a model of economic recovery and long-term prosperity.

And, Hawai'i will always be the model of a community whose diversity is its greatest strength, where people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds work together and live side-by-side.

All of us, one ‘ohana, we will ensure the next 50 years will be as rich and diverse as the first 50.

I feel blessed, and I am proud to be a resident of the State of Hawai‘i and a citizen of the United States America.

And, I am optimistic and I’m excited about what we can accomplish as we pull together in the months and years ahead.

Thank you for the privilege you’ve given me.

MAHALO.