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Governor of the State of Hawai'i
DAVID Y. IGE

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STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

GOVERNOR DAVID Y. IGE

TO THE THIRTY-FIRST STATE LEGISLATURE

MEETING IN JOINT SESSION, JANUARY 24, 2022

Good morning and aloha.

Before I begin —

In normal times we would gather together in the House Chambers for the State of the State address.

We would have family, friends, former Governors, and community leaders here, and have opportunities to acknowledge and thank the many people who have helped us along the way.

Because of the pandemic, they cannot be here in person.

But I wanted to take a moment to express my appreciation for their partnership during this crisis.

All of them answered the call to serve the people of Hawai'i:

Speaker Scott Saiki, Chair Syliva Luke and all the members of the House;

Senate President Ron Kouchi, Chair Donovan Dela Cruz and all the members of the Senate;

First Lady Dawn Amano Ige, Lt. Governor Josh Green, Dr. Libby Char and all the members of my cabinet; and

Mayors Rick Blangiardi, Mitch Roth, Mike Victorino and Derek Kawakami, and former Mayors Kirk Caldwell and Harry Kim.

I also want to thank the business community: the visitor industry, including hotels, airlines and attractions; the Hawai'i Restaurant Association; the Business Roundtable and the chambers of commerce; and

Our nonprofit partners who delivered help and services to support so many in need.

And there are so many others, too many to name.

Please know that all of your efforts are very much appreciated.

We've endured tremendous hardship over the last two years —

Throughout the pandemic, we've sacrificed, delayed, or canceled so many of life's cherished milestones: weddings and graduations; first birthdays and holiday gatherings.

We've had to face shutdowns, restrictions of all kinds, and two variants that have changed how we deal with the coronavirus.

And the fight is far from over.

But I'm proud of the way that we, as a community, have responded to the pandemic.

Our nurses, doctors and healthcare professionals have worked endless shifts to provide quality care and keep our families healthy.

Our teachers and principals have gone above and beyond to make sure students have the opportunity to learn despite the many challenges.

Our public employees on both the county and state levels have worked together to ensure that we keep everyone safe.

And you have done what you've had to do to protect all of us—by getting vaccinated and conducting your daily lives responsibly.

This pandemic is re-defining us as a generation—in the same way that the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor and the Vietnam War shaped their generations.

Events and history have a way of repeatedly testing us.

Each generation must find its own strengths, its own answers, and its own path forward.

In many instances, we've had to choose between what is best for ourselves as individuals and what is best for us as a community.

As a state, we've never been one to take the easy path.

Instead, we choose to do the right things for the right reasons.

Last week, we celebrated Martin Luther King day. He said, "The time is always right to do what's right."

In Hawai'i, we have a name for this: *pono* or righteousness.

An idea so important that it's imprinted on our state seal.

Ua Mau ke Ea o ka 'Āina i ka Pono.

The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness.

We have much to do in this session.

I have three goals this year: To continue to steer us through the pandemic, to strengthen our families and communities, and to move toward full economic recovery.

With your help, I know we can accomplish all three.

Protecting our Health

I believe everything begins with keeping us healthy and safe.

Over the last seven years, we focused on modernizing our telehealth infrastructure, providing health services to underserved populations, and strengthening mental health services.

In response to the pandemic, we moved quickly to:

- Take immediate action to protect our health,
- Provide healthcare for another 110,000 residents under our Medicaid program (a 34-percent increase since the start of the pandemic), and
- Make sure that everyone had good healthcare coverage.

At the same time, we distributed critical medical supplies, including PPEs, test kits, vaccines and medicines to protect the elderly, rural communities, as well as the entire state.

I deeply appreciate the thousands involved in this task, whose scale and complexity rivals anything we've ever done statewide.

Vaccinations have proven to be our strongest weapon against the Coronavirus.

In all, we've provided more than two and a half million shots at hundreds of clinics across the state.

Needless to say, this effort remains ongoing.

But the virus has been relentless in exposing gaps in our healthcare infrastructure, including critical shortages of doctors and nurses.

To address these concerns, we're asking the Legislature to fund the expansion of the University of Hawai'i's doctor residency program.

In this way, we can increase the number of doctors doing their residency on the neighbor islands from only five to 50.

More importantly, the numbers tell us that most young doctors end up practicing where they do their residency.

We're also asking for funding to strengthen the university's nursing program and add more clinical instructors at our community colleges.

We want to add 39 lecturers across multiple campuses to handle the increased demand for nursing programs.

In addition, a new \$3.7 million, federally funded project will improve access to health information, especially for underserved communities.

The project will train and employ high school and undergraduate students to be health and digital “navigators” in 50 libraries across the state.

These navigators will help individuals access telehealth services and find information on the coronavirus and other health topics.

Covid outbreaks at O’ahu Community Correctional Center made it clear that we also need to strengthen the medical facilities in our prisons to protect the health of our inmates, staff and the general public.

Our plans to relocate OCCC to Halawa will create a modern facility better suited to support the behavioral, mental health and medical needs of its population.

In our current budget request, we’ve also asked the Legislature for \$45 million to build a consolidated healthcare unit at Halawa that will allow us to better deliver medical and health services there.

Clearly, the coronavirus has shown us how persistent and adaptive it can be, as we’ve seen with the Delta and Omicron variants.

Even as we learn how to better protect ourselves, we need to remain vigilant.

Strengthen Community

While we work to maintain our health, we must also strengthen our communities.

To do that, we must first help our struggling families—to *malama pono*, make things right for them.

It means making sure they can secure the very basics of food, shelter, and jobs.

That’s why our Department of Human Services developed online applications for SNAP benefits (formerly Food Stamps) and added 32,000 additional families during the pandemic.

As many faced job losses, we provided \$6.6 billion in unemployment benefits, allowing those who are out-of-work to continue to receive essential income for their families.

The pandemic also caused many workers to lose long-held jobs and pursue new career paths.

To help them, the Department of Labor is rolling out the Hawai'i Career Acceleration Navigator, with its one-stop, online hub to help unemployed workers with new career and training opportunities.

The pandemic also highlighted the need for childcare for working families and how it is essential for many to continue to hold jobs.

To help them, the state's Child Care Program Office is distributing nearly \$80 million to support access to childcare and provide much needed relief for young families.

These funds will support childcare businesses weathering the challenges of the pandemic, and can be used for personnel costs, training, rent, mortgage, utilities, supplies, and equipment related to COVID-19.

To assist renters and homeowners, we provided \$260 million in emergency rent and mortgage assistance to ensure that no family would be evicted because of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the Hawaiian Homes Commission postponed mortgage payments and provided its beneficiaries with rent and utility assistance.

The state is also working closely with the counties to increase the number of affordable rentals on all islands.

These projects include rentals in Moiliili, Downtown and Chinatown on Oahu and more than a thousand affordable rentals units across the neighbor islands since we took office.

Two years ago, the Legislature created Ohana Zones.

Working with the counties, we opened 20 sites across all islands that provide a wide range of services for individuals and families.

These projects have assisted over 5,500 homeless individuals statewide, with more than 1,300 placed directly into permanent housing.

By increasing funding for the homeless by 68 percent since taking office, we've assisted more individuals to, not only find temporary shelter, but lift them out of the vicious cycle of homelessness.

And our proposed infrastructural development in West Oahu will allow us to greatly increase our inventory of affordable homes, including those for teachers.

But the biggest factor affecting home ownership in Hawai'i is supply.

That's why we set out to build 10,000 new homes by 2020—and we did it!

We also expect to build another 3,000 homes by the end of this year.

We can strengthen our communities in another way too.

Given the recent revenue projections, we're asking the Legislature to return some of those dollars back to taxpayers.

We want to issue refund checks of \$100 for every taxpayer and for each dependent.

For a family of four that means an extra \$400.

In this way, we'll also inject \$110 million back into our economy, giving it a boost as well.

EDUCATION

No community can be strong without taking care of their *keiki*—our future.

Empowering our schools and enriching Hawai'i's community of lifelong learners have always been among our top priorities.

That's why I've asked legislators to restore funds taken away from our schools during the pandemic—for programs so important to our children's learning and for the upkeep of their classrooms.

This includes funds to take care of those who teach our students and to support the development of new teachers, especially in areas with chronic shortages such as Hawaiian immersion and special needs.

That's also why safely reopening schools was one of our top priorities after the pandemic hit.

We knew that children learned best when they are physically in the classroom.

But that wasn't possible during the early days of the shutdown.

Our schools and teachers had to literally reinvent education—overnight.

Virtual classrooms became a necessity, but we also learned that they could supplement in-person classes and provide opportunities that would not otherwise be available.

That's why we're supporting the expansion of virtual classrooms and the Hawai'i Virtual Learning Network.

If a school on Moloka'i can't provide a class on physics, why should a student there be denied the opportunity to learn?

We've long talked about distance learning—but more as an alternative to the traditional classroom.

The pandemic made us realize that we could use virtual classrooms to ensure that every student has every opportunity to learn no matter where they live.

Using the federal Governors' Emergency Education Relief fund, we're also empowering schools and teachers to innovate and create projects to recover learning lost due to the pandemic.

We dedicated \$5 million for UH to launch a Hawai'i Online Portal for Education, which is developing curriculum for distance learning and additional training for teachers.

The projects include everything from STEM education to agriculture.

One of these projects is Ka'u Dream, a place-based, community-focused education initiative on Hawai'i island.

Educators and the community have worked together to align the curriculum to career and business opportunities in Ka'u.

They created enhanced learning activities that will engage and inspire students beyond graduation.

This community-led initiative is a model for building thriving communities across the state.

And it's time to retool our underutilized community resources.

For generations, our public libraries, like the one in Pearl City, have been quietly supporting our students and communities.

We want to "reimagine" how we use those facilities.

We want Pearl City to be the role model for other libraries across the state—a place where groups can meet and exchange ideas.

We want them to house early learning centers, as well as gathering places for our kupuna.

And we want to equip them with the latest technologies, where the community can learn, create, and enrich their lives.

"Reimagine," if you will, Pearl City Library, becoming a beehive of activity as a community-based learning center.

There have been a lot of things we've had to postpone because of the pandemic.

One of the most important was our proposal to create a universal preschool system in Hawai'i.

We can't leave it there.

Research tells us that early learning is crucial in preparing our children for school and life in general.

We will continue to nurture our early learners through our community-based centers.

But let's work together to take the next step to provide preschools for every child in Hawai'i.

Economic Recovery

The real balancing act during the pandemic has been between the economy and our health.

The fact is that keeping us safe—and making Hawai'i a safe place to visit—is an essential step to restoring our visitor industry, reviving our small businesses, and re-energizing our economy.

We ordered a mandatory quarantine for all trans-pacific travelers to slow the spread of COVID-19 in Hawai'i.

And our Safe Travels Program for pre-travel testing and vaccine verification remains the only program of its kind in the country.

At the same time, we worked hard to keep insurance rates down for small businesses, even as unemployment ballooned.

And as the economy recovers, we'll continue to make sure that our small businesses are brought along with the rising tide, through programs that:

- Expand our locally produced goods and services,
- Support business innovations,
- Back local manufacturers, and
- Fund low-interest, small business loans.

With federal funds, the state is also helping small businesses through digital marketing and e-commerce initiatives, assisting more than 500 companies with training and virtual marketing events.

Hawai'i also became one of the safest locations to film during the pandemic, as our film office worked with producers and unions to create a plan with strict covid protocols to resume filming here.

People all over the world can now watch NCIS Hawai'i, as well as Magnum P.I.

We also know that keeping up is not good enough to be competitive.

We must stay ahead of the game.

That's why we're proposing to:

- Fortify the Hawai'i Tourism Authority and the Hawai'i Convention Center,
- Support Hawai'i Small Business Innovation Research projects, and
- Provide fuel for our business accelerator programs and manufacturing assistance grants.

We'll also launch a \$56-million State Small Business Credit Initiative to provide capital for local start-up tech companies.

One of government's primary roles is to provide a strong and reliable infrastructure to support economic growth.

Our visitor industry cannot exist without reliable airports.

Our stores cannot operate without efficient roads and harbors to transport goods and services.

During an economic downturn, public works projects not only build critical infrastructure, they also provide a shot in the arm to businesses, labor and the economy.

For the last two years, Hawai'i's construction industry has led the state's economic recovery, thanks in large part to our investment in public infrastructure.

Those investments help stabilize the local construction industry and, with a record bond sale of \$1.88 billion, this trend will continue.

In addition, an estimated \$2.8 billion from the federal infrastructure law is expected to further boost the development of transportation, clean energy, and our internet capacity.

And government too needs to upgrade and reinvent itself.

That is one of the most important tasks we've been doing over the last seven years:

- Modernizing government operations across all agencies,
- Transitioning from antiquated paper-based systems to computerized ones,
- Modernizing our tax and payroll system, and
- Transforming walk-in services to convenient virtual centers.

And we're asking the Legislature to help us make government more efficient by replacing a statewide accounting system that hasn't been updated in the last 50 years.

Whether it's filing tax returns or seeking a birth certificate, our goal has centered around creating greater efficiency, a larger return on taxpayers' dollars, and better service to the public.

PROTECTING THE 'Ā I N A

We cannot be a strong state without protecting the resources upon which we depend.

That is also a part of being *pono* and making things right.

At the heart of these resources is the environment.

In Hawai'i, we're no strangers to the need to protect these islands.

There's a reverence for the 'āina that goes beyond issues of sustainability.

That's why we've always been so protective of the environment.

As an island community, we see the impacts of climate change and global warming more intensely.

In 2015, three category-4 hurricanes approached Hawai'i for the first time in recorded history.

In 2018, torrential rain in Hanalei dropped more than 49 inches in 24 hours, setting a new U.S. record.

Last year, the worst drought in decades on Maui County drove thousands of invasive axis deer into Kahului.

And severe drought on Hawai'i Island fueled the Mana Road wildfire, among the largest ever.

We know that the climate crisis is real.

But by working together, Hawai'i has become a world leader in actions to fight the climate crisis.

Hawai'i was the first state to set a goal of 100-percent renewable energy by 2045, with 12 other states following our lead.

Hawai'i was also the first state to commit, by law, to the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Still—experiencing first-hand the severe impacts of climate change—we know that net-zero carbon emission is not good enough.

That's why Hawai'i became the first state to commit to a net-negative goal by 2045 to capture more carbon than we produce.

We'll do that by protecting our oceans, expanding our native forests and supporting sustainable agriculture.

Again, my thanks to our legislators for making all of this happen.

But we need to continue this good work:

We need to:

- Retire Hawai'i's last coal plant,
- Establish a rebate for working families to buy electric cars,
- Expand the State-To-Farm program to support local farmers, and
- Move forward with the Royal Kunia Agricultural Park to encourage food self-sufficiency

Creating a more sustainable lifestyle is all part of being good stewards of these islands.

So is protecting them from harm.

The recent events at the Navy's Red Hill facility alarmed and shocked everyone.

We've met with Navy leaders and let them know that their first job is to ensure that our drinking water stays safe and clean.

Draining the fuel tanks at Red Hill is a good first step.

But we must work to find long-term solutions.

National security cannot come at the expense of our people's health.

I believe we can protect both national security and public health.

But it will take determination and the collaborative efforts of everyone.

BUDGET

In the first year of the pandemic, we were forced to cut over a billion dollars from the budget, with every state agency scrambling to find new ways to continue to provide essential services to our residents.

More than that, we faced the prospect that it would take the economy decades to recover.

Describing our financial prospects back then as bleak would be an understatement.

But we took the hard and necessary steps to address the very thing that threatened the life of our economy: the pandemic.

Many wanted us to immediately fix the symptom of the problem, the devastated economy.

But we needed to balance that with putting people's health first.

As painful as it was, it was the right remedy for the long term—to make things *pono*.

When things seemed to get better, we tempered our optimism.

And we continue to do so—with economic, as well as health issues.

As you heard last month, we now expect a positive balance in our budget of more than a billion dollars.

Tax collections have jumped by an astounding 27.3 percent over last year's totals—that's a direct reflection of the rebound in visitor arrivals, increased consumer spending, and the growing strength of our local businesses.

We have a chance to restore painful cuts that have been made over the last two years, to repay outstanding loans, and to replenish various state funds, including:

- Loans to the Unemployment Trust Fund,
- The state's depleted "Rainy Day" fund, and
- Cuts from our schools and state agencies that provide essential services to our people.

In other words, we have a chance to safeguard our future and our children's future.

When we face another catastrophic emergency, will we be prepared to deal with it?

For the first time in a long time, we have the resources to take care of both our immediate and long-term needs.

We can rebuild the solid fiscal foundation that we created before the pandemic.

We also have a chance to pursue new initiatives, including the development of an all-inclusive broadband infrastructure.

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's about the crucial role that the internet plays in all of our lives.

That's why we're leveraging state resources to maximize federal funding for Broadband and proposing the largest investment in technology in state history—a total of more than \$400 million.

We're calling it *Apakau Ka La*, “spreading of the sun's rays.”

It is critical infrastructure for the future connecting all of the main Hawaiian Islands.

This initiative will not only close the digital divide between the haves and the have-nots, it will strengthen us as a community.

We also recently launched the Affordable Connectivity Program, which extends federal emergency broadband benefits to those who would not otherwise be able to afford internet service.

It's estimated that more than 100,000 Hawai'i families will be able to qualify for internet service under this program.

More than that, we have a chance to lift every business and every family with this incoming tide—to take everyone with us, whether we're talking about business growth, career opportunities, healthcare, housing or education.

In spite of the strengthening economy, there are still many businesses on the brink of failure and many families who are struggling to make ends meet.

We cannot leave them behind. As a community, it's not in our nature to leave them behind.

The tide is rising, and it should lift all of us.

CONCLUSION

Hawai'i is unique—our geography, our people and our history.

As the only island-state in the nation and as an amazing multicultural community, we celebrate our diversity.

This distinction is at the heart of how we govern. There's no One-Size-Fits-All way of governing.

That's why we're a government “of the people, by the people and for the people.”

That's not just a cliché, but a recognition that our government should reflect and respond to that diversity.

This is also what has directed and shaped my decisions.

It's also been one of my greatest challenges.

There's a popular local saying: "Keep the country country."

In an era that is propelling us through unprecedented changes and challenges, how do you keep Hawai'i, Hawai'i?

How do you sustain and nurture what makes us, us?

How do you do that, even as we must change to meet the times?

How do you make things *pono*?

Like our response to the pandemic, there is no easy answer.

But I believe it lies somewhere deep within all of us who call Hawai'i home.

It lies in our willingness to share—to give, even when we have very little to give.

It is tucked deep within our desire to lift and lighten the burden of others.

It's our deep-seated belief that we're part of a greater 'ohana and that we have a responsibility to our community.

We are all connected.

It's taken generations, stretching back to those pathfinding sea-voyagers, to create this amazing and wonderful sense of community.

There are some who fear we're in danger of losing it through the many changes that we've endured.

I am not one of them.

From my vantage point, I see a Hawai'i that remains strong and true to itself.

I see families come together, even when they cannot not physically get together.

I see a generation reaching down to take hold of a younger one, and the young reaching up for guidance from their kupuna—something we've always done here in the islands.

I see a Hawai'i that has been tested and tested over, and over again during this pandemic.

We may have bent, but we did not break.

I believe in Hawai'i, in its people and in its purpose.

When we work together, we can do great things—things like those I've talked about today, to:

- Help all who are struggling to make ends meet, whether it's \$100 or \$400;
- Provide childcare for working parents and preschools for every child in Hawai'i; and
- Create a broadband network that includes everyone in every community.

I am proud of the work that we do. And I am proud.... proud to be your governor.

For all that you do and all that you are, my thanks and deeply felt aloha.

Mahalo.