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2006 State of the City Address

Mayor Sounds Off On Taxes, Transit, Solid Waste and Affordable Housing

By Mayor Mufi Hannemann, 2/24/2006 4:49:56 PM

Aloha and good morning, Chairman Dela Cruz and members of the Honolulu City Council and distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen.

I'm very grateful to Chairman Dela Cruz and the members of the Honolulu City Council for inviting me to speak to you in this chamber, where you work so tirelessly to serve your constituents. Gail, my family, and the members of my administration join me in thanking you for your warm welcome.

This year is a milestone in the history of the City and County of Honolulu. It's our centennial, the anniversary of the establishment, in 1905, of county government in the Hawaiian Islands. It was a cause championed by Prince Kuhio, during a prolonged period of political turmoil and change in these islands.

Our population at the time had pushed past 60,000 and was rising rapidly, as waves of immigrants continued to arrive to work in the sugar and pineapple plantations that then dominated our economy and our landscape, and which would continue to do so for another half-century. The year before, the Chamber of Commerce had spent 500 dollars to promote a nascent tourism industry. The Hawaiian Pineapple Company's Iwilei cannery was a year away from opening, and the founding of the University of Hawaii two years away.

So much has changed since then. Some would argue whether it has been good for us. We often lament the way things used to be: a time of fewer people, less crime, no traffic, more open space, cheaper homes, less hustle and bustle. But change has always been, and will always be, a fact of life.

Through it all, through many years and many generations, this has been our Honolulu, our home.

Having lived through the latter half of Honolulu's 100 years, I've experienced our changing Oahu. And, yes, it has sometimes been difficult to accept, but I still feel blessed to call this my home.

I've been fortunate. I've enjoyed the opportunity to live on the mainland, to travel to distant lands, to visit places I once read about only in books. That's no small feat for a kid from an immigrant family of seven kids from Kalihi. I know many of you come from similar backgrounds, and have shared many of the same experiences.

My endeavors have taken me far from Hawaii, in miles, but not in spirit. And there's been no greater feeling, no greater spirit of pride and homecoming, than to see the green Koolaus, Diamond Head, or the sparkling, blue sea off Waikiki on my return—a sentiment eloquently expressed by Keola and Kapono Beamer in their enduring classic, "Honolulu City Lights."

And that is why I come before you with the deepest appreciation, and with humility and gratitude, that I'm able to work with you to contribute to the betterment of our Honolulu, our home.

Cooperation, Collaboration

Yes, Honolulu is our home, but no home can survive without the support of every member of our island family. What I said in my inaugural address bears repeating today. You may recall that I used Nainoa Thompson and the voyaging canoe Hokule'a as an analogy for our times, where a collective, collaborative effort was required to prepare for and complete an arduous journey. Reaching our goals today requires the same kind of commitment.

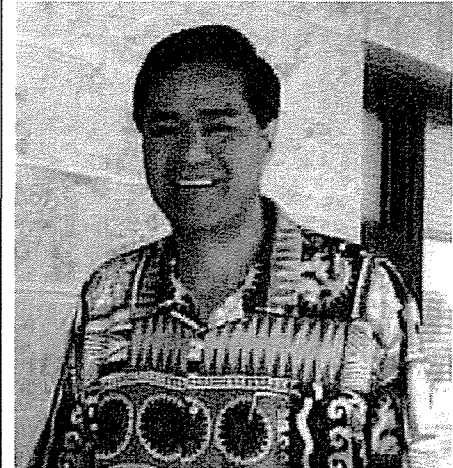


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the job gets done and our roads are improved.

Second, we're repaving roads. By this December, we'll have spent 66 million dollars over a two year period to rehabilitate and reconstruct 181 miles, using a comprehensive approach that's long-lasting and easy to maintain.

We completed roads in Pupukeya, Kahuku, Makakilo, Palolo, and Waipahu, while work on Waimano Home Road and Harding Avenue is in progress. Budget and staff resources permitting, we're scheduling work for Beretania Street, Kilauea Avenue, the much-traveled Keeaumoku Street, University Avenue, Hamakua Drive, Manoa Valley, Ala Wai Boulevard, and Alewa Drive, to begin this calendar year and on into 2007. Then, we are requesting 30 million dollars in the 2007 fiscal year for the rehabilitation of North King Street, from Liliha to Ola Lane; Keolu Drive in Kailua; Moaniani, Waipio Uka, Ka Uka, and Ukee in Central Oahu; and Moanalua Road and Kaahumanu Street in the Aiea-Waimalu area.

We introduced last year a pilot project to reconstruct failed pavement areas in selected areas. Dubbed "localized rehab," this method is a fast-track repair and resurfacing of streets in subdivisions and neighborhoods. We've successfully tested it in Waipahu and are beginning a project in Village Park, having paved 50 miles so far, with another 20 to go.

Sewers

Sanitation projects-meaning sewers and other waste disposal-will account for the largest single item in our capital improvement budget for the 2007 fiscal year. We raised sewer fees last year and vowed to use that money for sewer work and nothing more. As you can see, we're delivering on that promise.

We're completing upgrades to the Sand Island Waste Water Treatment Plant, valued at 176 million dollars, the Kalaheo Avenue sewer project, and the Ala Moana pump station modifications.

Last year, we announced plans to replace 6,600 feet of sewer line on Lewers Street and Ala Wai Boulevard at a cost of 30 million dollars; design is under way and construction is expected to begin in early 2007. The Saint Louis Heights sewage project, announced last year, is also expected to begin about the same time. That work will involve 45,000 feet of sewer line and cost 20 million dollars.

A project to begin in a matter of months is the long-awaited and, to some, much-dreaded Kapiolani Boulevard project, which involves replacing underground water and sewer systems that are more than 70 years old. The success of this project, and all the sewer work for that matter, will depend on cooperation, communication, and an understanding public, which I know Board of Water Supply Manager and Chief Engineer Clifford Lum and his City colleagues will encourage and support during what will be a lengthy construction period.

Sewer reconstruction in the Wanaao Road and Keolu Drive areas of Kailua, with a price tag of 31 million dollars, will begin in the middle of 2007. We'll be working on sewers on Renton Road, Halona Street, Kaneohe Bay Drive, and Houghtailing Street. We'll be improving sewers in Waimalu, Kalihi, Nuuanu Valley, Wilhelmina Rise, Waiialae Iki, Kuliouou, and Waimanalo. We're making an emergency replacement of the Niu Valley force main, and doing similar work at Fort DeRussy. We're strengthening the Hart Street pumping station and the Honouliuli and Sand Island waste water treatment plants-and these are just the big projects.

I suppose any mayor would much rather be talking about, say, new parks and gyms today, but I think you'll all agree the decidedly unglamorous priority of sewers is far too important and pressing to be ignored any longer.

Solid Waste and Recycling

There seems to be a perception fueled by some that we haven't done enough about solid waste. Let me refute that right now.

As soon as we took office a year ago, we knew, like the Council did, there were problems at the Waimanalo landfill. Environmental Services Director Eric Takamura and members of our administration met with the operator, Waste Management, to order improvements. A new management team was retained, and the company has since reduced leachate levels and odors, improved grading, reduced litter, and corrected its recordkeeping and other deficiencies. Even the State Department of Health admitted the City had made significant strides in correcting past shortcomings.

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One of my early priorities was bringing equity to no-call, regularly scheduled, bulky-item and white-goods pickup, and we're making good on our promise to take it island-wide. We started pickup last March on the Leeward Coast and added the North Shore and Windward Oahu to Kahaluu later in the year, with excellent results. We're continuing our roll-out, and next week, we'll introduce pickup to the Halawa-to-Makakilo area, extend it to Wahiawa and Mililani in May, and complete the entire island by July with service to Waimanalo, Kailua, and Kaneohe.

With respect to curbside recycling, we've grown accustomed to the notion that trash pickup is free and limitless. We have twice-a-week refuse pickup. We have twice a month green waste pickup. And we have once a month bulky-item pickup. We all expect this for free. Compounding the situation is the past administration committed more than 2.5 million dollars to purchase and distribute 50,000 blue bins to homes, without a feasible plan to put them to use. That's why next week we're beginning "greencycling," or free, automated curbside recycling of green waste.

With our planned rollout, we hope to reduce the amount of green waste sent to our landfill by 60,000 tons over the next two years, and increase that to 90,000 tons when the program reaches maturity. In comparison, twice-monthly curb-side collection of mixed recyclables would cost every household 300 dollars per year, while removing only 20,000 tons of waste from the landfill. Lastly, the state's HI-5 program is doing quite well, recycling a significant portion of the mixed material. The City plans to further support HI-5 by opening redemption centers on City grounds in Waikiki and Nuuanu and providing 40 more recycling bins at schools and other sites. Not only do we expect to reduce waste by 19,000 tons, but we're also helping schools and non-profit organizations to raise money, a worthy goal Councilmember Ann Kobayashi shares with us.

We can also do much more to educate the public. For example, just last November, we put on a highly successful Discover Recycling Fair at the Blaisdell Center that attracted more than 6,000 people, most of them students. As Councilmember Rod Tam recently said, recycling begins with our children. That's why we plan to repeat the fair this coming September 21 to 23.

Much of the credit for our refuse and recycling success must go to our City employees, as well as the cooperative spirit of the United Public Workers.

On April 1, the Synagro plant will begin converting sewage sludge into fertilizer pellets. That will remove more than 8,000 tons of sludge from the waste stream and reduce much of the odor generated from dumping it at the landfill. We're also working with the Navy to recycle sludge, a move that will compost another 2,100 tons in the waste stream.

In working with Public Works Chairman Rod Tam, I'm pleased to announce that we've selected a consultant to update the City's integrated municipal solid waste plan.

We're partnering with Hawaiian Electric in an unprecedented way to explore new, alternative energy technologies fueled by municipal solid waste. This should improve the City's capacity to convert trash to energy, cut the amount of waste going to the landfill, and reduce our dependence on imported oil.

Despite these steps, the City Council just approved a measure calling for the closure of the Waimanalo landfill in 2008, reversing a decision they made just 14 months ago. There are enormous economic, logistic, and permitting challenges associated with that decision, particularly given that no alternative site has been recommended. Compounding the City's predicament is the previous administration's signing in 1999 of an agreement with the landfill operator, allowing for a 15-year extension, although they publicly promised later to vacate the dump site by 2008.

As I ponder the ramifications of the Council's latest vote and whether I should accept or reject Bill 37, this much is clear: It's time we institute a community benefits package. It is patently unfair to assume it's okay for only one part of our precious island to be the repository for all of Oahu's opala, and that the residents who live closest to the landfill will simply have to grin and bear it. I will include in our 2007 budget a 2 million dollar community benefits program for the people of the Leeward Coast to offset the landfill nuisance. We propose a package split evenly between grants for the district and capital improvements. Additionally, we are committed to improving the Waianae Police Station and completing the Waianae emergency access road. We will convene a committee of residents from Honokai Hale to Makua to decide how the grants will be apportioned, and suggest that the package could be used to help with homelessness and drug abuse, aid young people and seniors, or provide some

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financial incentive for those living in proximity to the landfill.

Transportation and Traffic

Traffic is our leading quality-of-life challenge. The City will make headway when we launch a ferry service from Barbers Point to Aloha Tower this year, as promised. New Transportation Director Melvin Kaku is soliciting proposals so a ferry operator can be selected and service begin by this summer. Several hundred commuters from Waianae, Makakilo, and Kapolei can take the shuttle bus to the ferry terminal at Barbers Point; arrive at Aloha Tower after 45 minutes on a comfortable, state-of-the-art vessel; and catch a shuttle bus to Ala Moana, Waikiki, or downtown. The ferry and bus combination, plus City-State cooperation, makes this a unique venture never tried in previous incarnations.

This will be a key element of what we call our multimodal transportation system that includes the ferry, our proposed rail transit, improved synchronization of traffic signals, and other elements that, in total, will help to ease the growth of congestion.

We're also helping to reverse the commute by encouraging more business activities in West Oahu. I hold weekly meetings at Kapolei Hale and my cabinet meets there monthly. We helped Hoku Scientific locate to Kapolei and are providing Community Development Block Grants to Easter Seals and Goodwill Industries to establish operations. We're also supporting the Salvation Army's plans to build a major community center.

We continue to have one of the best bus systems in the nation, thanks

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