

ONE OHANA

Part 1

Hawaii is one ohana — one family.

When we come together, we can meet any challenge, and accomplish anything we set our minds to.

More than twenty years ago, I started taking care of local families as a doctor in a small clinic on Big Island.

The people of Naalehu, Ocean View, Punaluu, South Kona, and Volcano took me into their hearts and into their lives, and taught me the true meaning of aloha.

I learned how people in Hawaii take care of each other.

I saw how local families, communities, and churches reach out to people who need help, and how we try to lift people up whenever we can.

I also saw how difficult things could be for local families.

Many of my patients didn't have jobs.

Too many people I cared for were fighting addiction, or wrestling with untreated mental illness.

In Kau, we didn't have the resources we needed to fight these problems — so I ran for state representative to try to make a difference.

In the years that followed, as a member of the House of Representatives and the Senate, I learned more about these and other challenges we face in communities on every island.

And I continued to see these problems up close, as an emergency room doctor in Pahala and Hawi, and volunteering in clinics on Oahu when I wasn't working at the Capitol.

We kept working on addiction, mental illness, and access to quality healthcare. Some problems got better while others got worse.

We made sure all of our keiki have health insurance, we built a statewide trauma system, and we made sure families who had a child with autism could get help.

But too often I'd come home to Jaime from my weekend ER shifts with a tragic story of seeing another person who was homeless, or who had overdosed, or even worse, had taken their own life out of desperation.

We knew we had to do more.

Part 2

Four years ago, when you placed your trust in me to serve as Lieutenant Governor, we started to address the homeless crisis in a new way, with a new commitment.

The problem had gotten so bad, so difficult, that many people had stopped believing we could make a difference no matter what we did.

In Hawaii, many of us have so much, while others have almost nothing at all.

We knew it was our moral obligation to help those who were living without shelter.

Our team was inspired by the work at Kahauiki village, and we learned lessons from experts in Hawaii and around the world — that building communities of tiny houses for those who were homeless would actually make a difference.

We knew we could make a real difference if we pulled together.

We found pieces of land in Waimanalo and Kalaheo where we start to build Kauhale villages.

Community leaders like Alani Apio, James Koshiba, Auntie Blanche, and Twinkle had built just enough trust amongst the homeless community to get these struggling friends to come to the Kauhale.

Local developers donated their time and expertise, their materials and resources — and tiny homes began to sprout up.

Some public resources were added to the projects, social workers and veterans groups committed to provide professional support, and the kauhale began to rise.

One story in particular showed me how much hope this approach could create.

A young woman named Jocelyn had been homeless in Sherwood Forest for years with her younger brothers and sisters.

They felt trapped in their situation, they didn't see a way out.

After we'd built the kauhale village in Waimanalo, Auntie Blanche and Jocelyn found each other, and we welcomed Jocelyn's whole family into this new community.

They started a new life there.

Her brothers and sisters could go to school every day and Josiah, her little brother, could get the medicine he needed to stop his seizures.

Charlotte, a homeless elderly woman was discovered in Chinatown in unsafe conditions by Brooke Wilson, my chief of staff.

Charlotte is now in a kauhale community, living the quiet, safe, and dignified life all of our kupuna deserve.

We CAN end chronic homelessness in Hawaii if we pull together.

As Governor, I have already reached out to each of Hawaii's mayors and given them my commitment that we will build kauhale communities in every county.

We will choose parcels of land, partner with the private sector development community, build villages and support them with nurses, social workers and everyone else in Hawaii who wants come together to lend a hand.

And to show you that our new administration will not wait to take action to help people, I'll authorize the release of the \$50 million of grants-in-aid BEFORE THE END OF THIS YEAR, that the legislature had the wisdom to approve in May but has languished for the last seven months.

These critical funds will go to organizations all across Hawaii, like the Hawaii Blood Bank, the Hawaii Foodbank, the Domestic Violence Action Center, the Aloha Medical Mission, the Hawaiian Humane Society, IHS, and Special Olympics Hawaii, to pay for for social workers and mental health workers to support local families, to provide food for children who are going hungry, and to create safe places for victims of sex assault to seek shelter.

We are pulling together right now.

Part 3

Some of the greatest lessons we can learn about ourselves and our own values come from experiences we have far from home.

In September 2019, a crisis was unfolding in Samoa — a measles outbreak that especially threatened the children of our Pacific neighbor.

I wanted to help in some way — as a volunteer doctor with 3 or 4 colleagues and some donated medicine — and to bring some attention to the crisis as Hawaii’s Lieutenant Governor.

My good friend and former mayor Mufi Hanneman, a Samoan-American leader, put me in touch with Samoa’s Health Minister.

I offered her the very modest help I had planned — and then she shared with me how grave their situation really was.

Thousands of Western Samoa’s people were unvaccinated, and the Health Minister feared the outbreak would overwhelm their country in weeks and kill hundreds of their children.

She asked if we could immediately come to Samoa with an army of Hawaii’s healthcare workers, to help vaccinate the whole country and treat anyone who was critically ill in their very limited hospitals.

I told her we would try.

So we pulled together.

Jaime and I reached out to Hawaii’s healthcare community and asked if they would launch an emergency medical mission with us and go to Samoa immediately.

By the next morning we had 485 volunteers willing to travel to Western Samoa — with no hesitation.

Hawaiian Airlines provided a free plane to fly there, Par Hawaii donated tens of thousands of dollars of fuel, UNICEF gave 50,000 doses of measles vaccination, and Fiji Airways promised to fly us back.

I had never imagined such aloha.

I should have known better.

Within 48 hours, around one hundred of our local healthcare providers from Queens, Hawaii Pacific Health, and small clinics from all over Hawaii were flying all night across the Pacific to vaccinate the people of Samoa.

In the villages of that country we saw great suffering and tragic loss of life.

I remember entering a hale with my dear friend and colleague Dr. Nadine Tenn Sale, where a very young child had just died from measles.

We watched tears stream down the young mother’s face, and our hearts broke.

We were too late for that child. But we were there for a reason — we had to keep going.

In 36 hours, our volunteer medical team from Hawaii volunteers did what we were asked to do.

We vaccinated 36,997 people against the measles, and 6 days later the measles just stopped spreading.

Children stopped dying.

And we got back back on the plane and flew home to Hawaii, exhausted, but full of aloha.

The Samoan people have told me they will never forget what the nurses and doctors from Hawaii did during those 36 hours.

And in that moment, I realized that there is no challenge the people of Hawaii can't meet if we pull together.

Part 4

Six weeks after we returned from Samoa, ominous stories began to appear in the news from China, from Italy, and from around the world, that a new virus had been detected in humans for the first time, that we had no immunity to it, and that it was spreading fast.

The virus that would become known as COVID-19 was so new that no one could predict what would happen or how serious the outbreak would be.

Past coronavirus outbreaks had stalled in weeks or months, and we hoped this virus would do the same. But it didn't.

COVID would ultimately spread to every corner of the earth, including Hawaii.

Our health experts told us that without decisive action, as many as 10,000 people, mostly kupuna, would die in Hawaii.

But again, because of our values, we weren't going to let that happen.

We knew that if we pulled together, we could put up a good fight — and save lives.

So we masked up, and when vaccinations became available, we set up vaccination clinics across the state.

Hawaii ultimately vaccinated a higher percentage of our people than almost anywhere else in the world.

Partnerships grew between hospitals, that had never previously worked together.

Doctors and nurses covered for each other when they were too exhausted to stand, after treating patients for 24 hours straight.

I remember walking down the corridor in the intensive care unit at Queens, hearing the distinct sound of ventilators breathing for our sickest patients, and seeing the exhaustion in our nurses' eyes behind their masks, as I stopped to offer a few words of support.

A woman approached us and shared that her daughter was in that ICU, on that hall, and she had been near death from COVID, and had been on a ventilator twice.

Her daughter was finally coming off the ventilator for good — she was going to live — and she began to weep with exhaustion, relief, and gratitude. We embraced her.

What she didn't know, was that at that moment, we had less than five days of oxygen left in our state because so many people were sick with COVID and needed breathing assistance in our hospitals.

She didn't know that hundreds of our nurses were having to quarantine because they themselves had tested positive for COVID.

We were literally running out of healthcare workers and Oxygen.

But once again we pulled together.

The Healthcare Association of Hawaii, led by Hilton Raethel, General Hara from our team, and the state Department of Health raced to find new sources of oxygen.

Hundreds of traveling nurses were approved by FEMA and rushed to Hawaii to support our sick and exhausted healthcare heroes.

Because of the commitment of these heroes and their refusal to quit, we averted an even greater crisis and loss of life — and ultimately Hawaii had the lowest fatality rate of any state in the country.

But none of this was achieved without great sacrifice.

Small businesses suffered, our economy slowed.

So we did everything we could to support them with the safe travels program and responsible guidelines.

Our teachers returned to work — even though there were too many keiki in each classroom for pandemic conditions.

In our correctional facilities, prison workers battled outbreaks that couldn't easily be prevented, as many of our most vulnerable people still weren't vaccinated.

Hotel employees, police, and firefighters worked to keep people safe and stop the spread of the virus.

Across Hawaii, people did their best to keep living their lives and stay safe — going to work, caring for their families, and protecting their neighbors the best they could.

In the end, because of how we all came together as one family with aloha and common purpose, Hawaii led the nation in almost every measure of success during the pandemic.

We were the safest place in America.

We were ONE OHANA.

Part 5

So where do we go from here?

How can Hawaii meet and overcome our greatest challenges, when other states across our nation are struggling to even talk to one another?

Homelessness is surging in urban centers across America, inflation and a growing housing crisis threaten the middle class way of life, and climate change looms over our entire planet and our future, in the form of droughts and fires in the west, to superstorms along the gulf coast.

Hawaii is not immune to these problems.

But unlike many others, we have proven we can come together and face big challenges.

When we saw homelessness and the suffering it causes, we came together and built kauhale communities to provide shelter and care. We need to build more.

And now we need to come together to build affordable housing.

As governor, I will unite us in common purpose, bring public officials together with private developers and philanthropists, and build thousands of new homes for Hawaii families.

With will and determination, we can turn thousands of illegal AirBnB's into affordable rentals.

We will empower the Department of Hawaiian Homelands to once and for all keep our commitments to the Hawaiian people, and house the thousands of Hawaiian families on the waiting list.

We stopped an epidemic of measles in Samoa — and now we will come together to address the healthcare disparities that affect our own people.

We'll use scholarships to pay down the loans that social workers, nurses and doctors have, so that they can afford to live in Hawaii provide care for our families who need it the most.

We dealt with the worst global pandemic in a century, better than anyone else, but we are still witnessing an epidemic of poverty and injustice our own back yard.

We'll eliminate regressive taxes like the tax on food and medicine, which hits poorest families the worst, to make Hawaii affordable for those struggling to survive from paycheck to paycheck.

And we'll find a way to restore justice for those who have lost their way and been forgotten by the legal system, but do not deserve to be lost forever.

Finally, we must come together to address the great challenge of this century, CLIMATE CHANGE.

Hawaii will lead on climate change when others just talk or refuse to act.

We'll reach our ambitious renewable energy goals in the coming years, by aggressively approving a range of renewable energy projects in our state.

Hawaii can lead on the biggest challenges facing our country and our planet in the 21st century.

We can set an example for the whole world on the issues of HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS, POVERTY, and CLIMATE CHANGE, if we truly come together and commit to putting our values of ohana and aloha into practice — and make them a reality for everyone in Hawaii.

This moment is a NEW BEGINNING for our state, and I am honored to serve as your GOVERNOR for the next four years.

We are ONE OHANA.

MAHALO AND ALOHA.