Aloha.

Thank you for this opportunity to be able to address you today.

I trust that my remarks this morning will demonstrate that our State Legislature is attuned to the military’s value to our community.

We all know how dramatically the attacks on September 11 changed our daily lives and the course of history.

When our young men and women in both our standing and reserve units are called to serve, that war or conflict happening on the other side of the world suddenly becomes very personal to all of us.

And that’s as it should be, not because we have a son or daughter; brother or sister serving, but because everyone who serves our country is someone’s son or daughter; someone’s brother or sister.

And we, who are the beneficiaries of that service and sacrifice, bear a special responsibility to our service members and to those who support them.

I bear a special responsibility...
Those are not words that I take lightly. I am a proud member of the military having deployed once in 2009 to the Middle East and continuing today as a 12-year veteran in the Hawaii Army National Guard.

We in Hawaii have a long and storied history with the military, going back to Pearl Harbor, the Korean Conflict, and Vietnam.

And the deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan affect us personally, because the military in Hawaii is not just an adjunct to our community. They are a part of our community. They are our neighbors, fellow church members and parents. Their children are our children’s friends, classmates and swim team buddies. When our troops go overseas, they carry a bit of Hawaii with them. How else could the shaka sign have found its way into so many corners of the globe?

Everyone here recognizes the economic value the military holds for our community. Behind tourism, the military is the second major source of revenue to Hawaii.

Nearly 100,000 of our residents depend directly on the military for their livelihoods. According to the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii, the total spending by the armed services in Hawaii in 2008 was $6.8 billion, with a multiplier effect in our economy that goes much further. And more than half of the annual locally-let defense contracts went to Hawaii’s small businesses, a critically important sector of our economy. The military presence in our community is deeply felt and appreciated.

Of equal importance, however, are their contributions to our state’s cultural diversity and our community strength, both as military units and as individuals. Yes, they are valued members of our ohana.
As members of the Legislature, we are in the unique position to ensure the relationship between the military and our various communities remains healthy and continues to grow in positive ways.

**Government bears a special responsibility...**

That’s why in 2004, the Hawaii State Legislature did something out of the ordinary. We developed a Military Appreciation Package that addressed the needs and challenges facing our military and their families. This was the first time something like this had been done and I would like to outline some of our successes over the past eight legislative sessions.

We increased the allowable income tax exemption for National Guard members and reservists. Today, Hawaii exempts $5,800 from state taxes, which is the amount an E-5 (sergeant) with a family of four with eight years of service receives for two weeks of annual training and two days each month.

We authorized the use of federal impact aid monies to establish a military liaison in the DOE and asked the Superintendent of Education to create a task force to address specific issues facing our schools with heavy military enrollments.

We created the Hawaii Medal of Honor for military personnel with Hawaii ties who are killed in action. Since the war began in 2003, we have awarded 284 medals to families of our military heroes.

We also relaxed license restoration requirements for professional, vocational and drivers’ licenses to those military service members who are deployed during state or national crisis.
We enacted the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children to remove barriers to educational attainment faced by children of military families.

We moved up our Primary Election date to the second Saturday in August to allow overseas voters more time to vote. This is especially important to the service members deployed to the Middle East.

We created the Gold Star Family license plates, which families that lost loved ones can get in a few months.

We introduced a 2011 Military Appreciation Package consisting of more than 30 measures. I cannot stress enough how aware and sensitive the members of the Legislature are to the military’s place in our community. And we welcome your input when you see needs we can help address.

These efforts not only provide concrete gestures of appreciation to our military, but also address significant recruitment and retention issues for our military services.

I don’t expect our involvement to end here by any means.

We’ll continue looking for more ways to support our military in the future, because...

**This University bears a special responsibility...**

It is a responsibility that the University of Hawaii takes seriously, with pride and respect for all that our men and women in uniform do for our country...
And for all that they sacrifice. In some instances, it becomes the greatest measure of what a citizen might be asked by his or her country.

Working together we can and must provide the strong support our men and women in uniform deserve. We can and must take care of our military families – the spouses and the children. Our military members should not have to worry about their wives or husbands or the welfare of their kids when away from home.

I have provided a list of some of the benefits that the University of Hawaii provides to the military. We have worked hard to address some of the challenges military service members face upon deployment and while a student at one of the 10 UH campuses.

The University of Hawaii can’t do it all, but it certainly can and should help. And the University will help.

As I mentioned earlier, it is a task we take on willingly and gratefully,

Because we all bear a special responsibility.

Mahalo and God Bless all of you.