A MESSAGE FROM RICHARD R. KELLEY TO OUR OUTRIGGER ‘OHANA

Aloha!

This is the week everyone in Hawai‘i has been waiting for — some eagerly, others with apprehension — since the plan to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings in Wailikiki was announced two years ago. Staff, security, press and delegates have begun to arrive, and meetings are already taking place in advance of the larger gatherings scheduled throughout the coming week at the Hawai‘i Convention Center and the JW Marriott Ihilani. Security will be tight. Unfortunately, there will be temporary inconveniences for many residents and businesses.

But what a great, long-term opportunity for all Hawai‘i!

Nearly 30 years ago, a group of Hawai‘i business leaders began meeting to discuss building a convention center in Wailikiki. They called themselves the Hawai‘i Convention Park Council and talked of all the opportunities that might come to Hawai‘i if we had a world-class convention facility in or near Wailikiki.

Trade, business, information and exchange of ideas between Pacific Rim countries might make Hawai‘i the “Geneva of the Pacific.” And the meetings at which such discussions, exchanges and negotiations would take place would provide a real boost to Hawai‘i’s economy, bringing thousands of higher-spending business travelers to these islands and thus broadening, strengthening and diversifying the main pillar of the state’s economy.

The economic benefits would touch almost everyone in Hawai‘i. Bell persons, housekeepers and front desk personnel in hotels would be busy. So would taxi drivers, hula hale, lei makers, flower growers, restaurant servers, airport workers and countless others. The money brought would circulate throughout the community again and again, generating tax revenue to provide benefits and services to the people of Hawai‘i.

Yes, it was clear then, as it is today, that Hawai‘i’s Pacific Business is Everybody’s Business!!

Fast forward to 2011. There is still only one Geneva, and it’s not in the Pacific, but other than that, the vision is being realized. Since its opening in 1998, international meetings at the Hawai‘i Convention Center have been routine and growing in number, size and frequency. In just the past 12 months, it has hosted nine international meetings and events with more than 50,000 attendees — world experts, scholars, scientists, policy makers and many, many more talented and influential people.

Granted, this has not been an “if we build it, they will come” phenomenon. Just as with our efforts to market Hawai‘i to leisure visitors, it takes constant, unremitting work to build Hawai‘i’s reputation as a great place for serious business.

But now, to cap off an amazing year, Hawai‘i is hosting APEC, the “Superbowl” of diplomatic and trade meetings.

Presidents, prime ministers, cabinet members, legislative leaders and a “Who’s Who” of some of the world’s top corporate CEOs — all monitored by legions of journalists and protected by unknown numbers of security men and women — will meet, exchange ideas and, hopefully, help turn around the world’s economy and improve security, trade and the environment for everyone.

Government leaders from APEC’s 21 member economies who are expected to be here include President Barack Obama of the United States, President Hu Jintao of China, President Dmitry Medvedev of Russia, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda of Japan, President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea, Chief Executive Donald Tsang of Hong Kong, President Benigno Aquino of the Philippines, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore, President Truong Tan Sang of Vietnam, President Felipe Calderon of Mexico, Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada, Prime Minister Julia Gillard of Australia, Prime Minister John Key of New Zealand, and President Sebastián Piñera of Chile.

The APEC nations now account for:

- 40 percent of world population
- 55 percent of global economic output (GDP)
- 43 percent of world trade
- 58 percent of U.S. goods exports

APEC Is Here!
By Dr. Richard Kelley

I can personally remember what so many of the Asia-Pacific economies were like 60 years ago, when I graduated from high school. Many were still in shambles after World War II. Hong Kong did not have enough power and endured seemingly endless rolling blackouts. Sewage was carried through the streets of Tokyo in “honey buckets.”

What unbelievable improvements we have seen since those dark days! Today, APEC counts among its members the world’s three largest economies — the United States, China and Japan.

APEC leaders have also dealt with a number of other major problem areas in recent years, including terrorism, climate change, energy security, sustainable development and the global financial crisis.

Let’s hope that as the APEC leaders and their delegations grapple with the problems the world faces in 2011, everyone learns from these meetings not only that Hawai‘i is a great place to visit but a wonderful setting in which to accomplish really serious business.

More than that, perhaps the spirit of Hawai‘i’s Pacific island heritage will make possible progress and agreements that might not take place so readily in Singapore, Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok or elsewhere in APEC’s member nations.

Since ancient times, Hawaiians and other Polynesians have had a special way of bringing people together to resolve problems in a process called ho‘oponopono, or “setting things right.” As the leaders of the 21 APEC member economies meet with each other this week, I hope they will feel our Hawaiian spirit. A touch of ho‘oponopono would be a healthy contribution to APEC.

To everyone who is here in Hawai‘i for APEC 2011 …

E komo mai. Nou ka hale. *

Aloha! *

Welcome. Come on in. Our house is yours.

Hawai‘i’s Convention Center

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