



35TH GUAM LEGISLATURE INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Speaker Tina Rose Muna Barnes



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HISTORIC GUAM CONGRESS BUILDING
Hagatna, Guam

35th Guam Legislature Inaugural Address **Speaker Tina Rose Muna Barnes**

Hafa Adai Yan Manana Si Yu'us!

Governor Eddie Calvo, First Lady Christine Calvo, Lieutenant Governor Ray Tenorio, Governor-Elect Lou Leon Guerrero, First Gentleman Attorney Jeff Cook, and Lieutenant Governor-Elect Joshua Tenorio; Chief Justice Maraman, and fellow Justices; members of the Diplomatic Corps; distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen; and, most importantly, our dear People of Guam.

Welcome to the Guam Congress Building and to the first sitting of the 35th Guam Legislature.

Before I begin, I want to also acknowledge the presence of off-island dignitaries, President Thomas Remengesau, Jr. of the Republic of Palau and Ambassador Wallace M.G. Chow of Taiwan. They are friends of Guam and friends of ours. I am grateful that they traveled to be here with us today.

As I stand here, I realize no one comes to the Office of Speaker alone. For this reason, I am thankful for the trust of my colleagues, and I fully understand the special responsibility that you have given me.

I also want to thank those who serve with me—though their names have never appeared on a ballot:

My mother Ann who, although isn't here today, has always been my strength, she is still recovering in Arizona.

My husband Jake who has always been my safe place.

My children and grandchildren who are my joy and special thoughts for my son Coby who was recently deployed.

My siblings and extended family and a special prayer for my brother Jason, who is watching from heaven above with my father, Bill.

On Guam, as it is with many island homes, family has a special meaning.

Family is about more than blood. It is also about who we are bound to by choice.

I know that I wouldn't be here today without the help, love, and support of many—but two people who gave me a start stand out in particular.

In the mid 1990s, A young woman was focused on her work at the Public Defender's office.

Her dreams were simple: make ends meet, take care of her family, give her life meaning through the service of others.

Then one day, she was called to Adelup. With little warning, or time to think, the Governor of Guam asked her to serve as Deputy Director of the Department of Integrated Services for Individuals with Disabilities (DISID).

This agency—created by then-Senator Lou Leon Guerrero—integrated the many fractured services and programs created to help persons with disabilities.

When asked why she, among all other options, had been chosen—the Governor’s response was simple: an agency like that needs a big heart!

I was that woman, Ladies and Gentlemen. And I got my start in public service because of Governor Carl T.C. Gutierrez.

Governor, First Lady Geri Gutierrez, *Un Dangkolo Na Si Yu’us Ma’ase* for giving me that opportunity.

Ironically, being speaker is less about speaking and more about listening.

Speakers listen intently. Their job is to hear both sides of a heated debate and enforce the rules fairly.

At its core, a Speaker’s role is to ensure that everyone is heard—even those with whom a Speaker passionately disagrees.

Only if the rules apply fairly to all, only after everyone has been heard, can argument and debate become consensus and decision.

I know what it means to truly hear someone, and how powerful it is to be heard by others. That’s a lesson I learned from my dad.

My mother had nine children but in my father’s home, I had—and still have—dozens of brothers and sisters.

That was his nature. Our home was a place where everyone could come together, and no one got left behind.

Once, a group of village elders brought a young boy to my father. He was beyond normal discipline. He would listen to no one. He would break curfew. He would commit acts of petty mischief, and push adults just as far as he could.

Like he had so often before, my father accepted him into our home. After months of relentless love, understanding, chores and responsibilities—my brother changed. He was part of a family that listened to him and he knew it.

Family taught me other lessons as well. – That without God we have nothing. That we are all each other’s keeper. That we should be honest, even when it hurts.

These lessons—simple as they are—aren’t unique to the home of Bill and Ann Muna. They are the cornerstone of every island family. They are the legacy of our oldest value. Respect (*Respetu.*)

But we who sit here are the heirs to another legacy as well. We sit in the historic light of the men and women who walked these halls decades before us.

They spoke out against injustice and stood up to fight it. And, when that didn’t work, they walked out and the world paid attention.

They wanted government off their back and on their side. They wanted leaders with imagination, not just petty insults. They wanted those in power to keep their promises, OR get out of the way, for those who would.

These hopes are not too different from the hopes of our People.

Our problems are well-known because they have been the same for so long.

We have too much crime on our streets, and too much hopelessness in our homes. We have too much debt and far too little investment in an economy that creates jobs. And instead of dreaming about what they might be as adults, far too many of our children live in fear of abuse and neglect.

Yes! our problems are well-known and they are great, but so is our capacity to meet them.

We can repair our roads. We can rebuild our schools. We can fight crime. and We can defend our ports against a rising tide of drugs.

BUT, to accomplish these goals, we must rebuild our People’s trust in those they elect to public life.

We must reform our government, and re-energize our economy. And because of our People, I believe we can. This body benefits from Senators ready to do their job.

We have an army officer trained to protect our nation's most vital assets in cyberspace. A woman who understands duty, honor, and a call to service.

Senator Telena Cruz Nelson dedicated her previous term to the construction of the Landlord and Tenant Rental Act and the adoption of professional standards for those who would lead our public safety agencies.

We are blessed to have the energy, ideas, and passion of Senator Amanda Shelton, Senator Sabina Perez and Senator Kelly Marsh Taitano women whose ideas will bring lifesaving equipment to GMH, safeguard our environment, and reimagine our economy.

We are rooted in the experience of Senator Therese Terlaje—a woman whose life has been committed to the advancement of the Chamorro People, the protection of its sacred lands, and the fair application of our laws.

We are stronger because of Senator Régine Biscoe Lee—a mother who fought to protect Guam's children with the first local appropriation to Child Protective Services in years.

We are better because of Senator Joe San Augustin, Senator "Pedo" Terlaje and Senator Clynt Ridgell – men whose lives have been spent enforcing the law, building resilient communities, and telling truth to power.

Legislating is not an individual sport. In this hall, on this floor, VERY LITTLE IS.

We all share the same island, and love the same home. We all want to see it better. That is where our work starts and where we must always return.

Despite whatever label we wear on Election Day, our problems are not Democratic problems or Republican problems.

We will need the grace and calming wisdom of Senator Mary Torres, and her boundless work ethic, as well as the business savvy and innovation of Senator Jim Moylan.....

We must draw on the heart and commitment of Senator Louise Muna, and Senator Telo Taitague—to expand services for those battling cancer and to ensure that those who need medical cannabis, GET. IT. NOW.

We will count on the experience of Senator Wil Castro to help us enhance education and send even more of our kids to IVY League Universities.

For decades, leaders from both parties avoided tough calls, and kicked the can further and further down the road.

I know that we won't get it right 100% of the time, but partnership always works more than partisanship. And *"we are all in this together"* ALWAYS works better *"than you're on your own."*

I believe that we can reform our government, rebuild the foundations of our public trust, and reimagine our economy. I believe that.....because I believe in you and in the woman whom we have elected governor, our Maga Haga.

To reform our government, to make it work in the 21st century, we need to remember whom we govern for.

When small businesses can't compete because they are confused by the policy we create in this hall; when people spend a day in line instead of a day at work; when government employees give up, because they believe nothing will ever change; when their best ideas to increase efficiency, improve services, or inspire savings are lost because they are ignored—WE MUST DO BETTER!

Reforming our government will also require us to **make** change our friend, and not our enemy. We must do what is hard—and we must do it together.

It is imperative that we invest in our workforce, in their jobs, education, and futures—and at the same time, that we cut our growing debt and that we end our structural shortfall.

This will not be easy. It will, as Speaker Benjamin Cruz once said, "require sacrifice—not sacrifice for sacrifice's sake—but sacrifice for our sake, for the sake of our children, and for the sake of our children's children."

To rebuild the foundations of our public trust, our choices must be open, honest, and subject to the white-hot light of scrutiny. And above all else, we must be bold enough to change.

An old adage says, "trust can take a lifetime to build and a minute to destroy." Whatever it takes..... however long it may require.....let us always be worthy of our public's trust.

To reimagine our economy, let us remember that young does not mean unable and that tradition does not always equal truth.

As each of you work to craft your first bills, know that a new law isn't always the answer.

The Guam Code Annotated is filled with provisions that have never been enacted—legislation intended to attract new industries, to capture revenues held in black markets, and cut costs.

For more than a decade, the wisdom of our People, chose a Governor from one party and a Legislature from the other. That is not the case today.

Madame Governor-Elect, Lou Leon Guerrero, LT. Governor elect Joshua Tenorio, we want collaboration, instead of conflict; we want to solve problems, not lay blame; and we know the People of Guam want that too!

Though we share the same values, hold to the same Party, and consider each other family, our roles do differ.

The Legislature is a separate, coequal branch of government.

We know that a hallmark of any good friendship is the ability to tell each other the truth.

This means WE WILL exercise responsible oversight..... WE WILL pass a conservative budget..... WE WILL exercise the power of the purse to benefit of our People.

This is our sacred responsibility—and no one can be harder on those they love than family.

A community leader stated in a 2012 speech “Historically, politics have been dominated by men and through the years women have been making a greater presence. There is a need for women representation, as no one can better advance the interests of women than women themselves.”

She added “Many of our past and present women senators have been successful, but we need to have greater representation. Women in Politics on Guam have improved our representation, but it is not there yet. The most we have had in the legislature is 29 percent representation, and yet we make up 51.8 percent of the electorate. We have had the first female Speaker; we have not had a female governor. We have made strides, but we need to work harder.”

The woman who wrote those words believed in them so much, and she decided to run for Governor herself – And she won.

Today, that 29% is more than doubling to 67% in the Legislature. Today! we have made history.

BUT, Let us not forget, that we are joining the ranks of pioneers who have set the standard that we uphold. Rosa Aguigui Reyes, Mariana Lujan, Cynthia Torres, Lagrimas Untalan, Conception Barrett, Cecilia Bamba, Elizabeth Arriola, Candelaria Rios, and in addition to politics, Agueda Johnston, Gloria Nelson, Ignacia Bordallo Butler and Maria Palomo Ada. We are also blessed to still have the friendships and guidance from Speaker Judi Won Pat and Congresswoman Madeline Bordallo. All these women, sacrificed, to pave the way for their daughters and each of us here today.

Making history with a majority of women in the legislature, a female governor, a female chief justice, a female federal judge, a female president of the Mayors council of Guam, that in itself speaks volumes. But for me, that is not enough.

History is being made everyday, let us work together, continue to make history, take our island to heights that she has never reached before.

In closing, I am reminded of a statement President Obama made in his final days in office:

“I think of this job as being a relay runner. You take the baton, you run your best race and hopefully by the time you hand it off, you’re a little further ahead, you’ve made a little progress I want to make sure that handoff is well executed because ultimately we’re all on the same team.”

BIBA TEAM GUAM!