

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY February 7, 2011

OPENING DAY REMARKS
DELIVERED BY SPEAKER JOHN OCEGUERA

As Prepared for Delivery

Speaker Pro Tem Smith, Majority Leader Conklin, Minority Leader Goicoechea, members of the Nevada Assembly, legislative staff, and honored guests. Thank you.

To the friends and family who share this day with us – thank you. Thank you for the support you’ve given us on the journey here and for the support we’ll need from you in the months to come.

This is both a formal ceremony and a day to rejoice.

On one hand it is a very serious responsibility to be sworn in as a member of this Assembly.

On the other hand there is reason for rejoicing. We’ve each reached a goal we worked so hard to achieve, and we have family and friends to share in the joy of today.

I know I couldn’t have done it without the help and understanding of my wife, Janie, who is here today with our son Jackson. Jackson, and I are fortunate to have Janie in our lives. Her joy for living, her enthusiasm, and her support keep me going.

I would not be, could not be, standing here today if not for her.

Janie is one of three women here today who deserve my personal recognition and gratitude. The others are my mother, Eileen, and my grandmother, Margaret.

As is the case with so many Nevadans today, I grew up in a family facing many financial challenges.

I live in Las Vegas, but I was born in Reno, and was raised in Fallon. My mom was only 16 years old when I was born, and she soon became a single mother.

We lived through tough conditions where basic necessities were never taken for granted. My mother worked, saved, and scrambled to get a college degree to become, for 32 years, a very beloved and respected teacher in my hometown of Fallon.

She was my inspiration to do well in school, to go on to college, to work my way up in the fire department, to choose public service, and run for office. My mother gave me the strong belief that you can work with others to make things better.

I want to simply say, for all you've done, and with all my heart, thanks, Mom.

Growing up, I had another family role model.

My grandmother is a Native Nevadan, born in Schurz, and a Native American, still living in Schurz on the Indian reservation.

My grandmother Margaret has 10 children, 23 grandchildren, 26 great grandchildren, and 2 great-great-grandchildren on the way.

To my grandmother, I owe my love of this state, its land, its people, and my respect for its hard-won history.

Each of these three women shaped my character in different ways.

I'm grateful to have them in my life.

And to my colleagues: Thank you for the honor you've bestowed and the trust you've shown in electing me your Speaker.

Over the next 120 days, I'll work hard to deserve this honor and justify the trust of each and every one of you.

We have 20 new members in this house today. One of them comes to us from the Senate and another returns to the Nevada Assembly after an absence of a dozen years.

But still they are new to this house in this session.

Twenty new Assemblymen and women, nearly one-half of our membership, would you all please stand?

To all of you, each one of you: congratulations...and welcome.

The Assembly truly is the people's chamber. The diversity in this body reflects that of our state: urban and rural, northern and southern, men

and women from all walks of life, and many ethnic backgrounds. This, ladies and gentlemen, is what Nevada looks like.

Whether newly elected or returning we should all enjoy this day. A proud moment after the rough and tumble of the campaign. One quick breath before submerging ourselves in long days filled with difficult decisions.

Make no mistake, in this session there will be difficult decisions.

And we'll be criticized for many of them.

Our work will become fodder for a future campaign mailer, a pundit's column, or an angry editorial.

But it's better to be criticized for doing our job, than criticized for failure to act. None of us can afford to be timid. We will disagree, but let each member of the Assembly vote for what we know is right, not just expedient.

It's always been true that when it comes time to make a decision to record a vote for Yes or No; every vote counts exactly the same.

Now more than ever, every voice in this chamber is needed, encouraged, and essential.

But those voices should be courteous.

Even as the face of this chamber rapidly changes it's important to preserve the traditions that have served us well for nearly a century and a half—the traditions of civility and respect.

We can disagree, but we can do so as friends and colleagues.

No matter what our differences of party or position we can respect one another, and work together as the people elected us to do.

The Great Recession may officially be over for the nation, but we still have critically high levels of unemployment and foreclosures.

Our infrastructure no longer meets the needs of a modern Nevada.

The need for social services is high while our resources are thin. We have the largest percentage budget deficit in the nation.

In addition, Nevada is highly dependent, overly dependent, on discretionary spending from out of state visitors. Only when the national economy improves, will Nevada's economy truly rebound. But that doesn't mean we should simply wait, tied to the same old ways and short-term solutions.

Certainly there are positive signs both nationally and here at home. Nevada has a long way to go before we're healthy again, and unless we prepare for the future now, by improving education, diversifying our business base, and reforming our tax structure, we will have learned nothing from this experience.

We welcome a new governor this session. Two weeks ago, the Governor presented the Executive Budget in these very chambers.

Now it is the job of the legislature to determine if the sacrifices placed in the scales to balance the budget can be sustained.

Or, if they are too much to ask of Nevada's citizens who have already lost so much in the recession.

I respect the Governor's work in crafting the budget. I believe he will respect ours in reviewing it.

President Kennedy once said, "Any system of government will work well . . . when everything is going well . . . It's the system that functions in the pinches that survives."

Ladies and gentleman of the Assembly, we're in the pinches.

How we govern now will determine how we survive this economic crisis, how well we recover and how we rebound.

We have a big decision to make.

Do we just patch things up for another two years?

Or will take this opportunity to be bold—to make the fundamental changes needed to move our state forward by rebuilding and investing in Nevada?

I believe we must reform government, we must find lasting solutions, not quick patches. We must prepare our state to meet the future ready for work, ready for business, and ready to lead.

In 120 days, we'll know the answers to these questions.

Our challenge is to balance the budget, as we must. But these are not just numbers. Our duty is to serve real people with real problems.

We must act with compassion and empathy for the people we are here to serve.

In 120 days, history will judge us. Not on how stubbornly we clung to old ways, not on how loudly we shouted for change, but on what we DID.

Thank you for your service to the great state of Nevada. May God bless us all.