

**16<sup>th</sup> Annual Asia Pacific Conference  
New Year Celebration  
Tacoma Dome Exhibition Hall  
February 15, 2014  
(As prepared)**

Greetings to everyone, and to those of you who are from the magical island of Tahiti, maeva (MAH-AY-VAH), which of course means “welcome”.

As lieutenant governor of the great state of Washington, it is once again my honor to recognize the many cultures that make the Pacific Northwest such a rich and diverse place in which to live. This annual Asia Pacific Conference just seems to get bigger and better every year. It is a true local celebration of the heritage of a significant number of Washington citizens and all that you contribute to our state.

The occasion for this celebration is to observe the Lunar New Year, which this year falls under the Year of the Horse.

Today we pay special tribute to Tahiti, the largest of the islands that make up the French Polynesia. I would like to welcome the representatives from the national Tahiti tourism office who are joining us from San Diego today.

Linda and I have never been to Tahiti, but who among us has not dreamed of exploring her beautiful coastline and beaches, and perhaps sailing among the myriad of islands that make up this archipelago and basking in the warm tropical climate.

To me, in the chilly Pacific Northwest in February, that sounds pretty good about right now. Many of you here have no doubt experienced the islands of the South Pacific firsthand and I would only ask that one of you take me with you sometime!

I understand that the population of Tahitians living in the state of Washington is quite small, but nonetheless we share the Polynesian culture through an appreciation of lively drums, music, dance and the arts that come from the islands. Some of you may be familiar with Te Fare O Tamatoa (TAY – FAR-A (roll r) TOMa-TOE-a), a non-profit organization that promotes the Tahitian culture in the Puget Sound region and teaches a popular dance class.

And while I am talking about Polynesia, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my friend Jack Thompson, known as the Throwin’ Samoan from his Washington State University

days as a star quarterback, for his induction into the Polynesian Football Hall of Fame last month. I got to know Jack through our work together in mentoring, and know he is very community minded and an outstanding representative of the Asian Pacific Islander community wherever he goes. What a great and well-deserved honor for Jack. Some of you may know that Jack, who could not make it today, is a cousin by marriage to Lua Pritchard, who is largely responsible for putting on this big event today. What an interesting time they must have at their family events.

Just for fun, I would now like to share with you a special connection to Tahiti and the South Pacific that not a lot of people may know about. Just about 50 miles north of here, on property owned by the Port of Everett, sits the hulk of an old decrepit vessel, surrounded by weeds and protected only by a leaky roof and cyclone fence to discourage vandals.

This vessel had served out its time and was left to rot out in the harbor as part of a jetty project way back in 1957. But this hull mysteriously floated up one day and some people knowledgeable of the boat's history were able to bring it ashore with the hopes of restoring her. The vessel was the Equator, which last saw service as a tug in the Puget Sound.

But in its early days it was a two-masted schooner that sailed the South Pacific, and was chartered for almost a year in 1889 – the very year our great state was founded - by none other than Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson. Robert Louis Stevenson, an acclaimed Scottish novelist, poet, essayist, and travel writer, sailed the South Pacific and visited places like the Gilbert Islands, Tahiti, New Zealand and the Samoan Islands and the islands of Micronesia.

Two of his most famous works, a collection of stories called *In the South Seas* and a book called *The Wrecker* were largely based on his adventures in the islands while sailing on this vessel, *the Equator*. Strangely you can find stories about the Equator being haunted by the spirits of Robert Louis Stevenson and King Kalakauna, an island chieftain he befriended. The Equator was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

Over the years there have been a few attempts to restore her, and perhaps someday someone will take a strong enough interest in this vessel and bring her back to her earlier grandeur.

Again, I wish you a Happy New Year, this Year of the Horse. May it be a productive and prosperous year for each and every one of you. You have a lot for which to take pride in, and we are so pleased that so many can be here to enjoy this celebratory day.

Thank you.