



**Address  
by President of Iceland  
Halla Tómasdóttir  
at the Opening of Alþingi**

**4 February 2025**

Members of Alþingi!

I welcome you to the opening of this parliament, and to your important work as the nation's legislators.

Each opening of parliament marks the start of a new journey. I wish the new government, and all members of parliament, success in all their work.

It is more than half a century since such a large proportion of new members have taken their seats at Alþingi. We should be grateful that people are willing to undertake demanding tasks in the interests of the nation, and that voters have a wide range of candidates to choose from. New members bring with them new perspectives, and refresh the ideas upon which parliament's work is grounded. At the same time, we must not undervalue the knowledge and experience of those who have served in parliament for longer. Parliament's mechanisms for preparing and enacting legislation are complex, and cannot be learned overnight. The more renewal among parliamentarians, the more essential it is that experienced members share their knowledge and skills with generosity and patience. The same may be said of those who now leave government to form an opposition.

Reasoned criticism and scrutiny from the opposition are, of course, important factors in the work of parliament, and it is essential to handle matters fairly and rationally. But the role of the opposition is not only to criticise. Effective mediation of experience and knowledge is essential in all governance, and is a cornerstone of a healthy democracy. Good ideas do not originate exclusively with members of the majority. We must be

open to proposals that meet a need, and be prepared to accept them, regardless of who originally proposed them. As Prime Minister Ólafur Thors (1892-1964) once observed: “The identity of the proposer should never be allowed to penalise a good case.”

I ask you not to be so focussed on whether you are part of the 36-person majority or the 27-person minority that you lose sight of the fact that you are, first and foremost, 63 members of Alþingi, whose common cause is to work for the good of the people of Iceland, and to safeguard their wellbeing.

As I welcome you to your work in parliament, I wish to thank those who have now left Alþingi for their contribution. I wish them good fortune in their future undertakings, in which I am sure that the experience they have gained as parliamentarians will serve them well.

The work of a member of parliament is far from easy. Certain formalities must be observed here, and parliamentarians must be able and willing to observe the rules. At the same time they also need to be creative and forward-looking, to be in touch with the pulse of society, and see how matters are developing, and how the people of this country may be steered towards prosperity. That is no small responsibility, for innumerable issues must be addressed, and it is a demanding task to familiarise oneself with all of them as required. It is truly a rigorous task to enact legislation on matters that may not have existed a few years ago – where it may even be necessary to coin new words to name new phenomena, and to learn new ways of thinking, in order to grasp the new reality. Interdependence between different sectors of society grows ever more complex, with more chain-reactions; and at the same time it becomes more difficult to distinguish between real information and misinformation. As we deal with the changes that have already happened, we must also look to the future: what changes may be foreseen in the coming years and decades? Or even in the next few days or weeks, to judge from recent international developments. How will we prepare our society to face them? Such challenges must be met, not only with new language, but with new thinking. That is a huge challenge, for a united group who join forces to seek the best solutions in the short and the long term. It demands willingness to work together, as well as a fertile imagination and disciplined working methods. The work of a parliamentarian is a balancing act, that requires respect for established forms along with creativity, and the courage to rethink ways of working.

Members of Alþingi. The nation trusts you to perform that balancing act. I know that you will all work in good faith in the interests

of our country and people, and strive to win the people's trust and respect for Alþingi. Trust and respect are grounded primarily in honesty in arguments and conduct. It is not enough to be determined; we must also examine differing views, scrutinise them with the logic of mind and heart, and then take a well-considered position. There is no shame in changing one's mind, if the change arises from considered thought. A phrase that is commonly cited among Norwegian mountain-hikers is "det er ingen skam at snu" (There is no shame in turning back): Turn back, rather than lose your way due to obstinacy and dogmatism. Let us find the best path: two heads are better than one; let us listen to each other.

We have come together here today as the days are growing longer, and the sun is rising higher in the sky. Yet threatening clouds are building up on the horizon – some of them uncomfortably close to us. Recent developments raise questions about the worldview of the Western nations, whose foundation was laid in the wake of World War II. That worldview is based on international agreements and laws. The system was originally designed to ensure a balance of power, but over time international collaboration has also paved the way for a common compass for scientific progress and conservation of culture, and has thus become a basis for progress when it comes to health, education and human rights. Iceland benefits from international collaboration, and it is natural for us to ask what the impact will be for us, if international organisations receive less support and international law is disregarded. It is possible that you, our excellent parliamentarians, will soon have to make significant decisions about the future and security of our country and our people. And then it will be good to pool your experience and knowledge, and introduce approaches that are conducive to collaboration, not only across party lines but also with others who are involved. We are fortunate to have skilled specialists and advisors, and to enjoy close and solid collaboration with our neighbouring countries, as well as goodwill and respect in the international arena.

We face many challenges, but our opportunities are also many. Poet Theodóra Thoroddsen (1863-1954) reminds us that "the mind carries us half the way to new worlds." Thoughts and words are the starting point – but then action must follow. It is a vital element of Alþingi's balancing act to be able to integrate thoughts, words and deeds. I wish you good fortune in drawing up the image of the society you want to see, and doing your utmost to make it a reality.

I wish Alþingi and the government all good fortune, and I ask you to rise in honour of our homeland.