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HAWAII

Hawaii House Unveils Lineup Of Committee Chairs

Rep. Scott Nishimoto will take over as head of Judiciary and Rep. Richard Creagan will steer Agriculture.

NOVEMBER 22, 2016 · By Nathan Eagle   

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State House leaders on Tuesday identified the chairs and vice chairs of the 17 committees that will shepherd hundreds of bills next legislative session, which starts in January.

The committee chairs wield significant power, being able to single-handedly kill a measure by not giving it a hearing. The culture within the Hawaii Legislature also dictates that the members of any given committee follow the chair's lead, making it rare to see lawmakers dissent on a bill.

For the most part, it'll be familiar names in familiar places next year. But there were a few notable changes to the committee lineups.

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Rep. Scott Nishimoto will chair the Judiciary Committee next session, one of the most important.

Rep. Scott Nishimoto, who had chaired the Legislative Management Committee, will head the Judiciary Committee, which numerous bills of broad import must pass through.

Rep. Karl Rhoads had chaired Judiciary, but he stepped down for a successful bid this fall for an empty Senate seat. (Rep. Bert Kobayashi will replace Nishimoto as chair of Legislative Management.)

Nishimoto is close with top House leaders, including Reps. Sylvia Luke and Scott Saiki.

Luke will continue chairing the Finance Committee, the most important of all committees as it oversees the overall state budget and virtually any bill with a fiscal component. Saiki remains [majority leader under Speaker Joe Souki](#).

The Democratic majority caucus created a new Intrastate Commerce Committee, chaired by Rep. Takashi Ohno, that will focus on regulations and licensing of Hawaii businesses, including banking, telecommunications and property insurance, according to a House release.

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Rep. Takashi Ohno, foreground, will chair the new House Intrastate Commerce Committee. Rep. Della Au Belatti, background, will chair Health again.

Rep. Isaac Choy will no longer chair any committee. He had headed up Higher Education but Rep. Justin Woodson will be taking over that post next year. (Choy's only committee leadership role is vice chair of Intrastate Commerce.)

Rep. Mark Nakashima, who had headed the Labor and Public Employment Committee, will move over to chair the Economic Development and Business Committee.

Rep. Aaron Ling Johanson, who [left the Republican Party](#) to join the Democrats less than two months after his 2014 election, will replace Nakashima as labor chair.

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Rep. Tom Brower, right, will chair Housing next year. Rep. Sylvia Luke, center, will continue as Finance Committee chair.

Rep. Tom Brower will chair Housing instead of Rep. Mark Hashem, who will have no chairmanships next year. Brower made national headlines in recent years for [taking a sledgehammer to shopping carts](#) being used by homeless people and for [getting assaulted](#) while taking photos of a homeless encampment.

Brower had headed the Tourism Committee. Rep. Richard Onishi will chair that one instead.

Rep. Richard Creagan will chair Agriculture, a committee that [the late Rep. Clift Tsuji](#) had steered.

Rep. Mark Nakashima will chair Economic Development and Business.

Cory Lum/Civil Beat



Rep. Richard Creagan, left, will be the new Agriculture Committee chair. Speaker Joe Souki, right, remains at the helm.

Other committees remain unchanged in terms of chairs: Rep. Angus McKelvey, Consumer Protection and Commerce; Rep. Roy Takumi, Education; Rep. Chris Lee, Energy and Environmental Protection; Rep. Della Au Belatti, Health; Rep. Dee Morikawa, Human Services; Rep. Kaniela Ing, Ocean, Marine Resources and Hawaiian Affairs; Rep. Gregg Takayama, Public Safety; Rep. Henry Aquino, Transportation; Rep. Ryan Yamane, Water and Land.

There are some new faces for the less influential vice chairmanship positions, including members from rival House factions and newly elected members.

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