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HAWAII

Hawaii Senate Reveals Committee Chairs For Next Session

Among the changes, Karl Rhoads will steer the Water and Land Committee, Mike Gabbard the Agriculture and Environment Committee.

NOVEMBER 29, 2016 · By Nathan Eagle   

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Hawaii Senate leaders Tuesday unveiled the chairs and vice chairs of the 15 committees that will shape what bills become laws next session, which starts in January.

Committee chairs are key players in the legislative process. They're able to almost single-handedly kill a measure by not giving it a hearing and often determine what amendments, if any, should be made. Committee members typically follow the chair's lead.

[Much like in the House](#), the Senate lineup is full of familiar names in familiar places next year. But there were a few changes.



Karl Rhoads, seen here last session when he was a member of the House, will chair the Senate Water and Land Committee.

“These committee assignments reflect the best use of the broad experience and expertise our Senators bring to this legislative body,” Senate President Ron Kouchi said in a statement.

Among the changes, Sen. Mike Gabbard will chair the newly formed Agriculture and Environment Committee, and Sen. Glenn Wakai will head the Economic Development, Tourism and Technology Committee.

Karl Rhoads — who was elected to the Senate earlier this month after 10 years in the House, where he chaired the Judiciary Committee — will chair the Water and Land Committee.

Sen. Jill Tokuda will continue to chair the most important Senate committee, Ways and Means, which shepherds virtually all the fiscal bills and the overall state budget.



Sen. Mike Gabbard will head the newly formed Agriculture and Environment Committee.

Sen. Gil Keith-Agaran will keep his post leading the Judiciary and Labor Committee, arguably the second most important committee. (Rhoads will serve as vice chair.)

And Sen. Roz Baker will remain chair of the Commerce, Consumer Protection and Health Committee.

Sen. Josh Green, the chamber's only medical doctor, had chaired the Health Committee until the Senate ousted Sen. Donna Mercado Kim as president and replaced her with Kouchi at the end of the 2014 session.

Green mostly sat on the sidelines last session but will be back in the fray next session as chair of Human Services, a committee that Sen. Suzanne Chun Oakland led for years. She did not seek another term, and Rhoads won the election to fill her seat.



Sen. Kai Kahele, second from right, will chair the Higher Education Committee. From left, Sen. Gil Keith-Agaran will continue heading Judiciary and Labor, Sen. Maile Shimabukuro will chair Hawaiian Affairs and Sen. Donna Mercado Kim will steer Government Operations.

In another change for next session, Sen. Kai Kahele, who just won his first election to office, will chair the Higher Education Committee, replacing Sen. Brian Taniguchi, who will head the International Affairs, Culture and the Arts Committee.

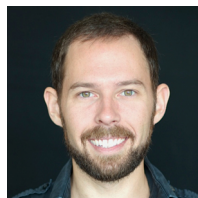
Kahele was appointed to the seat last year after the death of his father, Sen. Gil Kahele.

Sen. Will Espero, who had served as the chamber's vice president and was an outspoken [proponent of police reform](#) as vice chair of the Public Safety, Intergovernmental and Military Affairs Committee, will instead head the Housing Committee and serve as majority floor leader.

Here's a quick rundown of who is chairing the remaining committees: Sen. Michelle Kidani, Education; Kim, Government Operations; Sen. Maile Shimabukuro, Hawaiian Affairs; Sen. Clarence Nishihara, Public Safety, Intergovernmental and Military Affairs; Sen. Lorraine Inouye, Transportation and Energy.

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