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Hawaii House Speaker Dies of Apparent Heart Attack

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LANAI CITY, Hawaii (AP) — State House Speaker Richard Kawakami died Sunday of an apparent heart attack while on a deer hunting trip on Lanai Island. He was 56.

Kawakami was pronounced dead at Lanai Community Hospital about 2 hours after telling friends he had chest pains and was having a hard time breathing, said police Sgt. Louis Romero.

Kawakami, a 10-term Democrat and the senior member of the state House of Representatives, replaced Rep. Henry Peters as speaker in January at the start of this year's legislative session.

Vice Speaker Emilio Alcon will serve as speaker until House Democrats decide who will replace Kawakami.

"I am overwhelmed by the loss of Speaker Kawakami," Gov. John Waihee said in a statement. He described Kawakami as a very good friend, and a warm- hearted and caring man.

"Most of all, he was a person who loved these islands, especially his home island of Kauai," Waihee said.

Kawakami was first elected to the House in 1968. He became majority leader of the House in 1984.

Kawakami was the president of Big Save grocery stores on Kauai, and a director of a Toyota car dealership.

Kawakami was born in Waimea and graduated from the University of Hawaii in Honolulu in 1953. He received a masters degree in business from New York University in 1961.

Kawakami is survived by his wife, Bertha, and three children.

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