
Honoring
The Late State Senator
GILBERT KAHELE
Distinguished Alumnus



Gilbert “Gil” Kahele gave his all to the service of community and country. Believe it or not, Kahele’s life began in a grass shack located just to the south of the small fishing village of Miloli‘i in South Kona. Hawaiian was the predominant language. There was one teacher to serve all the students in the village.

Kahele’s parents, Peter and Rebecca Kahele, placed such a high value on education that they moved their family to Hilo in 1947. Gil was 5 years old and enrolled in kindergarten at Waiakea Kai school. Sadly, Gil’s father passed away at the age of 39, leaving his mother to raise five children. Kahele excelled at sports and played basketball at Hilo Intermediate and football for the Vikings.

After graduating from Hilo High in 1960, Gil joined the U.S. Marine Corps. He served four years and later graduated from Laney College in California in 1967. Kahele moved back to Hawaii and embarked on a civil service career that spanned some 33 years. In 1976, Kahele started working at the Pohakuloa Training Area, where he would eventually retire in 2000 as the facility’s Director of Public Works.

Kahele was introduced to elective politics in 1976, becoming a member of the Democratic Party and working to help elect fellow Democrats to office.

In the 1980s, Kahele spent a lot of time in Miloli‘i and made a name for himself as an effective community organizer. He had a knack for rallying people around a common cause. In 1986, Kahele co-produced a documentary, “Song of South Kona,” which looked at the history of the village and the songs that had been passed down through the generations.

Always active, Kahele was a member and chair of the Hawaii County Police Commission and the Na Ala Hele Trails advisory council. He held various Hawaii County and state Democratic Party posts, and received the meritorious achievement award for service from the Democratic Party. He also received the Yoneo Ono award for being an outstanding rural and community volunteer.

In January 2011, Gov. Neil Abercrombie selected Kahele to represent Senate District 2 on Hawaii Island, and he subsequently won re-election in 2012. While in office, Kahele served as chair of the Senate Tourism and International Affairs Committee as well as vice chair of Higher Education and the Arts. Mainly, however, Kahele was known for steadfastly supporting projects that would benefit the people of Hawaii Island.

Sen. Gil Kahele died Jan. 26, 2016. He and his wife Linda had two children, Kai and Noelani.
