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## **For Gene Ward, there's no place like home**

**The former state legislator narrowly escapes  
violence while consulting in Angola**

By Crystal Kua  
Star-Bulletin



For former state House Minority Leader Gene Ward, returning home on Independence Day from the war-torn African nation of Angola was a stark reminder of what people in America sometimes take for granted.

"It makes you appreciate some very basic things ... freedom, democracy and, most of all, how we've been able to keep peace," Ward said yesterday.

On the streets of the capital city of Luanda last week, a car occupied by Ward, five other Americans and an Angolan driver was surrounded by a group of youths armed with guns.

"It was spooky. It was a very tense time."

Angola, located along the southwestern coast of Africa, has endured years of civil war between government and rebel forces.

Ward, who gave up his Hawaii legislative seat in an unsuccessful bid for Congress last year, said he spent a week in Africa, training members of the Angolan parliament on how to prepare and fund a budget, as part of the U.S. State Department's democracy projects.

Ward said he was selected to go because of his experience as a legislator and a member of a minority party, and his time on the House Finance Committee.

Last Thursday, he and members of his group left a restaurant in a resort-like section of the city after finishing dinner.

"On the way back from the restaurant, the driver screeched and went off to the right."

The driver had struck a man who had darted in front of the car, Ward said.

"We went to see what his condition was," Ward said. "Then there was this sudden mob that appeared with two people with guns."

Ward said the estimated 15 youths "materialized from the dark out of nowhere" and surrounded the car, pounding the vehicle and jeering.

At one point one of the men in the car asked, "Does anyone know how to pray?" Ward responded that he did. "It was a prayer for protection."

Ward said the leader of his party and the driver were able to negotiate a safe escape by showing their American passports.

They went to a nearby hotel where they reported the incident to police and then eventually to the U.S. embassy.

In May, Ward wrapped up a four-month stint as chief of staff to Rep. Mark Moses (R, Kapolei) so he could become vested in the state's retirement plan.

Ward said he is now a self-employed consultant.

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