

Sen. John Pinto passes away at 94

Written by gallupsun
Friday, 24 May 2019 15:40

Staff Reports

Sen. John Pinto, D- McKinley/San Juan, has passed away. He was 94. Gallup first responders received the call shortly after 9 am May 24. Pinto was not breathing when responders arrived, and they were unable to revive him. He was surrounded by family.

Pinto served as a Democratic member of the New Mexico Senate since 1977, making him the longest-serving member in the Senate. Pinto represented the 3rd District, which includes the Four Corners area and spans much of western San Juan County, in addition to a portion of western McKinley County.

He served in the U.S. Marine Corps as a Navajo code talker during WW II.

According to the Navajo Nation, Pinto was born near Lupton, Ariz. in 1924. He attended a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school in Fort Defiance, Arizona and received his bachelor's degree at 39, and a master's degree in elementary education from UNM.

In 2001, he



received a congressional silver medal of honor for his service as a code talker. For 28 years he worked for the Gallup-McKinley County Schools system. As president of the Gallup Indian community center from 1950 -1970, he helped feed the homeless and the less fortunate families of Gallup. On May 17 of this year, Pinto received an honorary doctoral degree from Navajo

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Technical University, the largest tribal college in the United States

Here are some statements from state and tribal dignitaries on the passing of Sen. Pinto, **starting with his family:**

"The family of Doctor Senator John D. Pinto is saddened to announce his passing. He passed away the morning of May 24th in Gallup New Mexico surrounded by his family. He dedicated his life to public service. He was a Marine, Navajo Code Talker, longtime New Mexico State Senator, and family man. He worked tirelessly throughout his lifetime to serve the Dine people. The family would like to express their gratitude to his constituents and fellow legislators for allowing him to serve, it is what truly made him happy. He was 94 years old."

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham:

"John Pinto's towering legacy stretches far beyond the borders of New Mexico, and his loss will be felt across not only this nation but the world. A Marine and Navajo Code Talker, he played a crucial role in winning the Second World War, preserving freedoms for Americans and many more people worldwide. The debt we owe for that service, and the service of all Code Talkers, can never be repaid. A senator for more than 40 years, he represented his constituents with grace, wisdom and tenacity. Through the relationships he built and respect he earned, he was able to secure innumerable crucial investments for New Mexico communities, in particular Native communities. His record of service is unblemished, and his unwavering commitment to his people will forever serve as a shining example. I will miss his good humor, and I offer my deepest condolences to his loved ones, his family and friends."

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez:

"On behalf of the Navajo people, we offer our condolences and prayers for the family, friends, colleagues, and many others who had the honor of knowing Sen. John Pinto. Words cannot express the sadness we feel for the loss of a great Diné warrior who served our country as a Navajo Code Talker and in the New Mexico State Senate for many years. He dedicated his life to helping others and he changed the lives of so many people for the better. We will miss his smile, his humor, and his love and compassion for the Navajo people. We will miss hearing and seeing him sing "The Potato Song" that brought smiles to so many faces over the years. On

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behalf of Vice President Myron Lizer, myself, and our families, we offer our thoughts and condolences. May we take comfort in knowing that Honorable John Pinto is now with our Creator.”

Attorney General Hector Balderas:

"I am truly saddened by the passing of Senator Pinto. I will miss his inspirational view of the world and his kindness. Senator Pinto led New Mexico through some of its most important periods of progress. He honored his state as its longest-serving senator, and his nation as a Navajo Code Talker. My prayers are with his family.”

Navajo Nation Chief Justice JoAnn B. Jayne:

We have truly lost a legendary man. Senator Pinto was one of the Navajo people’s most honored and respected men, not only in modern times but of all time. His service to our people was unsurpassable having been a Navajo Code Talker and the longest serving state Senator in New Mexico. A man who fought for his people, his efforts most recently brought state funds to support the building of justice centers for our Navajo Nation. We will continue to reap the benefits of his service through all that he brought to our nation. Our people cannot thank him enough for a lifetime of service. Rest well, Senator Pinto, for you have earned it.”

New Mexico Senate President Pro Tem Mary Kay Papen

“There will forever be a void on the Senate Floor without John Pinto, but his presence will be felt here forever. He taught all of us how to lead with humility, tenacity, and heart. Today we mourn for his family and the Native American community that he served with such caring dedication.”

24th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon:

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In a life dedicated to service, Senator Pinto exhibited a compassion and warmth for all whom he touched. While his contributions to the Navajo People and the citizens of New Mexico are too numerous to list, the impact he made in the soul of the Navajo People and New Mexico citizens as a leader will continue for generations. Thank you, Senator Pinto, for your devotion to the betterment of your constituents and the sacrifices you made for your country.

New Mexico Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth:

"This is an extraordinary loss to Senator Pinto's family, the state of New Mexico, the country and anyone who know and loved him. It was an incredible honor to serve with Senator Pinto."

New Mexico Senate Majority Whip Mimi Stewart:

"Senator Pinto led a most incredible life, and I am proud and honored to have worked alongside him. His friendship and heart will be missed in the Senate and the loss will be felt for years to come, but he leaves us with a legacy that will be remembered for generations."