

State Senator, Navajo Code Talker John Pinto dies

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Sen. John Pinto, D-McKinley/San Juan, one of the nation's longest serving Native American elected officials died May 24.

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez said, "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. On 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."

Born near Lupton, Ariz., in 1924, he attended a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school in Fort Defiance, Ariz. and received his bachelor's degree at age 39, and later a master's degree in elementary education from UNM.

He worked for the Gallup-McKinley County Schools system for 28 years. As president of the Gallup Indian Community Center from 1950-1970, he helped feed the homeless in Gallup.

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Pinto served in the U. S. Marine Corps as a Navajo Code Talker during WWII. Upon his return, he became a member of the New Mexico Senate, representing the Third District, which includes the Four Corners area and spans much of western San Juan County, and a portion of western McKinley County, from 1977 until his death.

In 2001, Pinto received a Congressional Silver Medal of Honor for his service as a Code Talker.

On May 17 of this year, he received an honorary doctorate from Navajo Technical University, the largest tribal college in the U. S.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham extended her condolences to the family and public he served.

“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,” she said. “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.”

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