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On Friday night, August 18th, I learned of the passing of my dear friend Jackson Gibson, following his long and hard-fought battle with cancer.

At that moment, I felt that a true leader of the people had passed from us. He was a servant-leader and a chief in every sense of what those terms mean – a public servant who was independent minded, strong willed and outspoken, but who also kept in mind “his people”. Not just Navajos, not just Native Americans, not just Veterans, not just McKinley County citizens – but all of us New Mexicans and Americans, and visitors and guests, from all walks of life.

Jackson could be tough and stubborn and hard-headed, but he was at his core true to himself and generous of heart to all who crossed his path. He could be dead-serious at times, but also full of humor - almost always ready for a joke, a laugh, or a tease, and often at his own expense! He could be as down-to-earth as anyone around, but could also hob-nob with the rich, the famous, the powerful. To him, no one was superior to another by means of birth or circumstance, but he was a great judge of character, and it didn’t matter where you came from, if you were a “real” and honest person, a straight-shooter, and a true friend, then for sure, you had a loyal friend for life.

Even through his struggles with the cancer, all the way up to his last days, I never saw a change in Jackson’s character, his core nature, his sense of humor, his outreaching spirit. He was a talker all right, and for most of us, there was no such thing as a “short conversation,” but more than that, he was a doer – always ready to put his own hand to the till, if it was needed to move things along. He told it like he saw it, he did what he said he would do, he stood strong for what he believed in, he lived his values, and in the midst of it all, he stayed loyal, open-hearted and connected with his family and friends.

Jackson was a political player, but he was unique in how he played the game. He never displayed pettiness or held personal grudges – attitudes we see all too often among politicians. And all were welcome "in his tent," so to speak – high and low alike. He was the most recent, and the best ever, District 6 Commissioner on the New Mexico Transportation Commission, and the only Commissioner I ever heard of who each year sponsored a luncheon for all of the District 6 staff out of the Milan office. To him, every person was an important person in the work of the District.

Jackson was, for sure, an individualist, but he was also a great team player. His most powerful team was the one he formed with his wife Patsy, who was always by his side, always supporting, always connecting – the backbone of the partnership, he liked to say.

He was also very effective at bringing about communication and coordination between different groups – getting them to move in a common direction. When he saw barriers – like the way different bureaucracies went about their business – he didn't just complain about it. He learned where the pressure points were and where the chances for cooperation were, and then he helped solve the problems, overcome the barriers … and get things done!

I believe people could learn a lot, and benefit a lot, by following the Jackson Gibson model of leadership. Jackson was a trustworthy colleague and solid partner of mine in helping things happen for northwest New Mexico, he was a spiritual confidante and wise advisor, and he was and forever will be my true friend for life – and beyond.

Here's to you, Jackson Gibson! The flag of your life is at half-mast today, but will fly proudly across the years for generations to see.

With love, gratitude and respect,

Patty Lundstrom

State Representative, District 9

New Mexico State Legislature

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