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OJO ENCINO, N.M. – Speaker Seth Damon and the 24th Navajo Nation Council offer their condolences to the family of respected Ojo Encino community leader and former Council Delegate Harry J. Willeto.

Willeto was born on Jan. 3, 1942, in the community of Pueblo Alto near Farmington and Bloomfield, N.M. He is Naakai Dine'é (Mexican Clan) and born for Tódich'ii'nii (Bitter Water Clan). His beloved wife is Virginia Willeto and they were married for over 57 years.

"Mr. Harry Willeto is a loving father, grandfather, and beloved husband who was revered in his community for his loyalty and kind spirit," Damon stated in a press release published on April 15. "He leaves behind a legacy of public service to the Navajo people serving the Eastern Agency as Counselor Chapter President for years."

Damon spoke very highly of Willeto.

"Mr. Willeto was a humble man who deeply loved his family and the communities he served. The Navajo people send prayers of protection to give strength to his family during this time," Damon said.

Since the age of 21 years old, Willeto served as a public official advocating for the Navajo Tribal Police Department and for emergency medical services to be delivered to rural areas across the Navajo Nation.

In 1991, he was elected to the 17th Navajo Nation Council and since has served for 20 years on various committees including the Ethics and Rules and Public Safety Committee.

Chariman Daniel Tso worked with Willeto when he was the Ojo Encino chapter manager and Willeto was the chapter president. They also worked together on the Navajo Nation Council.

Tso remembered a time when Willeto fought for his community.

“Then in 2017, a land agent with the oil explorers made a statement about making millionaires,” Tso said. “Our Counselor Chapter President Harry Willeto fiercely responded by saying - ‘What about the health of our community members? Isn’t our health worth millions of dollars?’”

Tso explained that this battle took place when Willeto was facing health concerns himself.

“All this was stated when he was enduring health complications. That is a statesman’s perspective, and Honorable Willeto is a man to honor,” Tso said.

Funeral arrangements for Honorable Harry J. Willeto are being finalized by the family and will be posted on social media and in local newspapers.

Tso will officially present a Navajo Nation Flag to the family to honor his years of service to the Navajo people and the citizens of New Mexico.

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