



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
OFFICE – 928-871-7917
CELL – 928-309-8532
pressoffice@opvp.org

Former Navajo Vice President Taylor McKenzie, 76, dies, was first Navajo doctor, surgeon, Nation's medical officer

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Former Navajo Nation Vice President Taylor McKenzie, the first Navajo to become a medical doctor, surgeon, and the Navajo Nation's first and only Medical Officer, died Friday at Presbyterian Hospital in Albuquerque. He was 76.

Dr. McKenzie served as Navajo Nation Vice President under Navajo Nation President Kelsey Begaye from 1999 to 2003. He was appointed as the first Navajo Nation Medical Officer in December 2005. Prior to that, he served a distinguished 30-year career as a physician and surgeon with the Public Health Service on the Navajo Nation.

He was known throughout Native America as a symbol of success for what a Navajo and Native American person can do, and as an inspiration to others to enter the health care professions.

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., said he was saddened to hear of Dr. McKenzie's passing and said his thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Betty, their nine children and the rest of the McKenzie family.

"The late Dr. McKenzie made an important and great contribution to the Navajo people and the Navajo Nation through his service as a physician with the Indian Health Service for more than 30 years, as our Vice President, and as our first Medical Officer," President Shirley said.

"He loved his people and he dedicated his life and career to them," he said. "We all need to pay homage to his leadership. Through his contributions, we have grown and succeeded, and our Nation has become known as great. The Nation and our people will be forever indebted to him. He will be deeply missed."

On Monday, the President will issue a proclamation to have Navajo Nation flags flown at half-staff in honor of the late Dr. McKenzie.

Former Navajo Nation President Kelsey Begaye said he received news of Dr. McKenzie's passing this afternoon and was also deeply saddened by it. He remembered him as a good friend, a loyal and dedicated servant of the people, and a devoted health advocate for the Navajo Nation.



*The late Dr. Taylor McKenzie,
Navajo Nation Vice President 1999-2003*

"It was an honor to have chosen the first Navajo medical doctor and surgeon as Vice President," President Begaye said. "I thought that was something when I found out that he was a man of that caliber."

President Begaye said as Vice President Dr. McKenzie took the lead on all health issues.

"He just went 110 percent," he said. "The results are some of the clinics like in Pinon, the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, and laying the groundwork for a future clinic at Bodaway-Gap. It saddens me deeply to hear of his loss."

Anslem Roanhorse, executive director of the Navajo Nation Division of Health, said he and his staff were also shocked and saddened to hear of Dr. McKenzie's passing.

"I had a very wonderful working relationship with Dr. McKenzie," Mr. Roanhorse said. "I relied on him for medical advice. He has really taken us to a new level since he became Medical Officer of Navajo Nation Division of Health. I will miss him. He was a mentor to me. We will all greatly miss him."

He said Dr. McKenzie was responsible for oversight of technical operations at the division, helped establish the Navajo Task Force on Veterans Health Care, and was continually working on veteran health care issues and community-based out-patient care clinics.

Mr. Roanhorse said the entire division relied on Dr. McKenzie for expertise in many areas of health, from emergency preparedness to bio-terrorism to the public health arena.

"I'm very proud of him for having him served as the first Navajo Nation Medical Officer," he said.

Dr. McKenzie was a 1954 graduate of Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill. He received his medical degree from the Baylor University College of Medicine, Houston, Texas, in 1958. He interned at Pontiac General Hospital, Pontiac, Mich., from 1958 to 1959, and completed his surgery residency at Pontiac General Hospital from 1959 to 1963.

He became a member of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps in 1964 and served in that capacity on the Navajo Nation until he retired in January 1995 after 30 years of serving the Navajo people. He continued his medical practice part-time in the out-patient

department at the Gallup Indian Medical Center until he ran for Vice President in 1998.

While in the PHS, he served as Chief of Surgery at the Tuba City Indian Hospital, and the Shiprock Indian Hospital. From 1974 to 1977, he was detailed to the former Navajo Health Authority as executive director. He also served as the dean of the American Indian School of Medicine in Shiprock. In 1971, Dr. McKenzie was a founding member of the Association of American Indian Physicians.

Among his many accolades, in recognition of his decades of service to the Navajo people, the Wheaton College Alumni Association recognized Dr. McKenzie with its 2000 Distinguished Service to Society Award.

"We want all the Navajo people to have a voice," Dr. McKenzie told a reporter for his alma mater's alumni magazine. "My philosophy is to listen to people, to try to realize their needs, and then help them meet their needs. The needs are many."

He also received the New Mexico Distinguished Public Service Award and the Distinguished Service Medal from the U.S. Public Health Service. After leaving office as Navajo Nation Vice President, he served served as CEO of Sage Memorial Hospital in Ganado.

Dr. McKenzie was born on Jan. 31, 1931. He is survived by his wife Betty McKenzie, and their children Michael, Marvin, Judith, Gilbert, Patrick, Claire Klumpenhower, Kathleen, Edward, and Jeremy.

Funeral arrangements are pending.

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