REFERENCE TITLE: Lorena Williams; death resolution

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SR 1012

Introduced by
Senators Begay, Farley, Gallardo, Griffin, Hobbs, Landrum Taylor, Meza:
Barto, Biggs, Bradley, Burges, Cajero Bedford, Crandell, Dalessandro,
Driggs, Farnsworth D, McComish, Melvin, Pancrazi, Pierce, Shooter, Ward,
Worsley, Yarbrough, Yee

A RESOLUTION

ON THE DEATH OF LORENA MORGAN WILLIAMS.

(TEXT OF BILL BEGINS ON NEXT PAGE)
Lorena Morgan Williams passed away on January 18, 2014 in Fort Defiance, Arizona at the age of one hundred four.

Lorena Williams was born on January 11, 1910 in Balak'ai, Arizona. She was the matriarch of her family. She valued k'e (family) and all aspects of the Navajo/Diné culture and spirituality. She was resilient, as illustrated by the manner in which she endured the many hardships that she experienced over her 104 years of life. At a young age, Lorena Williams was forcefully removed from her home and family and sent to a boarding school. The experience was challenging, but she made the best of the situation and strived to acquire as much knowledge as possible in this foreign setting. As an adult, Lorena Williams positively reframed her experiences by incorporating and bridging aspects of the Western and Native cultures that she appreciated into her life. For example, she took up sewing, stressed the significance of structure, cooked Sunday meals and instilled the values of k'e in her loved ones by emphasizing the importance of family time.

Lorena Williams and her husband, the late Paul Williams Sr., are remembered for their role in Williams v. Lee, 358 U.S. 217 (1959), one of the “most important cases in the modern-era of [f]ederal Indian Law.” Mr. and Mrs. Paul Williams Sr. were the petitioners in this 1959 case against a non-Indian trader. The non-Indian trader initially brought this case against the Williams family to collect goods sold for credit. Both the trial court and the Supreme Court of Arizona ruled in the non-Indian trader's favor. According to The Independent, the Williams family “persisted through numerous appeals in the state and federal court systems in their effort to affirm the right of Navajo self-government and to reaffirm Navajo Nation sovereignty as recognized in the Navajo Treaty of 1868.” Ultimately, the Supreme Court of the United States held that the exercise of state jurisdiction in a case involving a transaction on a reservation between a non-Indian and an Indian would undermine tribal sovereignty and infringe on tribal rights.

Williams v. Lee signified the "legal resurgence of Native America in [f]ederal Indian Law and in particular, the renaissance of the Indian sovereignty doctrine, inherent tribal sovereignty." Bethany Berger, a professor at the University of Connecticut School of Law, noted that Williams v. Lee "created a bridge between century-old affirmations of the immunity of Indian territories from state jurisdiction and the tribal self-determination policy of the twentieth century." Additionally, Berger stated that both the case "and the policy developments that surrounded it emerged from consensus

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about the need for Indian equality and equal opportunity in the twentieth century, but Indian and non-Indian debate whether equality meant full assimilation and termination of the special legal status of tribes or continued respect for the ability of Indian peoples to govern themselves."

According to T. Peterson, one of Lorena Williams' grandchildren, "she was influential in shaping the era of modern federal Indian law[.] [She was involved in] Williams v. Lee only 11 years after full citizenship rights were granted to Indians in Arizona, despite the 14th amendment and 1924 Indian Citizenship Act. She [was] a boarding school survivor and one of the best collaborators and negotiators I [knew]."

In 2013, the Arizona State Senate honored Lorena Williams and Paul Williams Sr. with Senate Resolution 1003, which was proposed by former Senator Jack Jackson Jr. According to The Independent, the resolution recognized the couple for their "dedication and efforts to protect and exercise their freedom to govern themselves."

Lorena Williams is survived by two of her sons, Paul Williams Jr. and Victor Williams, and five of her daughters, Verde Lee, Dorothy Lee, Verna Peterson, Adeline Tsosie and Leona Strayhorn. She was preceded in death by her late husband Paul Williams Sr., four of her children, Wilmer Williams, Herbert Williams, Alvin Williams and Ruth Kelwood, and three of her grandchildren, Rolanda Kelwood, Adrian Williams and Rayland Kelwood. At the time of her death, she had 50 grandchildren, 90 great-grandchildren and 24 great-great-grandchildren.

Her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren recall how she valued her fruit trees, gardens, animals and beadwork and the sacredness of all things being interconnected. She was strong, yet she was also compassionate and empathic. She used her own life experiences as a way to establish a solid foundation for her family, which was built on the principles of spirituality, culture and education.

Therefore Be it resolved by the Senate of the State of Arizona:

That the Members of the Senate express regret at the passing of Lorena Morgan Williams and extend their deepest sympathies to her family members and friends.