

Daniel Akaka, first Native Hawaiian in congress, dies at 93

By Caleb Jones
The Associated Press

HONOLULU — Former senator Daniel Kahikina Akaka, the first Native Hawaiian elected to congress who served for more than three decades, has died. He was 93 years old.

Akaka died in Honolulu after being hospitalized for several months, said Jon Yoshimura, the senator's former communications director.

The Democrat served 14 years in the U.S. House before he was appointed to replace senator Spark Matsunaga, who died of cancer in spring 1990. Akaka won the election that fall for the rest of Matsunaga's term, and voters sent him back for consecutive terms until 2012, when he chose not to seek re-election.

His legislative style was described as low-key, a characterization he embraced.

"I have a Hawaiian style of dealing with my colleagues," he said.

Akaka developed a reputation as a congenial legislator who made many friends while making few waves in pressing the interests of the 50th state.

"Senator Daniel Kahikina Akaka embodied the aloha spirit," senator Mazie Hirono of Hawai'i said in a statement. "He dedicated his life to serving the people of Hawai'i as an educator, and in the U.S. Army, state government, the U.S. House, and the U.S. Senate. In congress, senator Akaka's care, empathy, and collegiality served as an example for us all."

In 1996, Akaka sponsored federal legislation that ultimately resulted in Medals of Honor — the Army's highest honor for bravery — for 22 Asian-American soldiers who fought during World War II. Those soldiers included the late senator Daniel Inouye, who was severely wounded in Italy while serving with the famed Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team.



Akaka once said his main accomplishment in congress was obtaining federal funds for Hawai'i for education, energy, and Native Hawaiian programs.

In the 2006 general election, the then-82-year-old senator stressed the value of his senate seniority and his opposition to the war in Iraq. Akaka went on to become chairman of the senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

He expanded his harsh criticism of the George W. Bush administration, getting involved in a number of issues with a more aggressive congressional staff. A World War II veteran, Akaka often stressed the hidden damage of war, including mental illness among veterans.

"As we work to meet the needs of all returning service members," Akaka said, "we must pay close attention to the full range of war wounds, from eye trauma and damage to service members' hearing, to (post-traumatic stress disorder) and depression, to burn injuries."

He introduced several measures to improve services to veterans, help aging Filipino vets who fought for America in World War II, and end contractor waste and fraud in Iraq.

But Akaka gained the most attention for his fight to pass legislation that carried his name.

The Hawaiian Recognition Bill, known widely as the Akaka Bill, was intended to give Native Hawaiians the same recognition as Native Americans and Alaska Natives.

Opponents called it unconstitutional favoritism toward one race even though it had broad bipartisan support in Hawai'i, a state where no ethnic group makes up the majority of residents. Even some Native Hawaiians expressed doubts, arguing it would give the federal government too much immunity from their claims regarding land or other issues.

House minority leader Nancy Pelosi remembered Akaka as a strong advocate

GRACIOUS STATESMAN. Senator Daniel Akaka, the first Native Hawaiian to serve in the senate, leaves the senate chamber on Capitol Hill in Washington after delivering his farewell speech, in this December 12, 2012 file photo. The former senator, the humble and gracious statesman who served in Washington with aloha for more than three decades, died April 5, 2018 at the age of 93. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite, File)

for all Native people.

"Daniel Akaka was a clarion voice for the rights and needs of Native peoples, ensuring that our commitment to Tribal nations and Native Hawaiians was never forgotten," Pelosi said in a statement.

Akaka's first foray into elective politics was an unsuccessful primary race for lieutenant governor in 1974. He eventually became a special assistant to then-governor George Ariyoshi.

Two years later, Akaka easily won election in Hawai'i's 2nd Congressional District — encompassing rural Oahu and the islands of Hawaii, Kauai, Maui, Molokai, and Niihau — and was re-elected six more times with at least 86 percent of the vote.

Born in 1924, Akaka grew up in a devoutly Christian home in Honolulu. He was the youngest of eight children of a Native Hawaiian mother and a Hawaiian-Chinese father.

After serving in the Army Corps of Engineers during World War II, Akaka earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in education at the University of Hawai'i. He was a public school teacher, principal, and program specialist for 18 years before becoming director of the Hawai'i Office of Economic Opportunity in 1971.

Akaka is survived by his wife, Mary Mildred "Millie" Chong, four sons, a daughter, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Associated Press writers Sophia Yan in Honolulu and Becky Bohrer in Juneau, Alaska, contributed to this report.

A spiritual western in Chloe Zhao's *The Rider*

By Lindsey Bahr
AP Film Writer

Cinema might have a worthy successor to early Terrence Malick in Chloe Zhao, whose second feature, *The Rider*, is a spiritual and poetic journey into the fading world of the Lakota cowboy, starring the real people who inspired her film.

As in her first, the beautiful *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, which was also set on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Zhao transports us to the badlands of South Dakota to tell the story of a rodeo cowboy who must give up his dream after suffering a devastating brain trauma during competition.

Brady Jandreau, a Lakota cowboy and member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, plays a fictionalized version of himself, Brady Blackburn, in the film. Jandreau was actually thrown from a horse which then stomped on his head during a rodeo in 2016. He was in a coma for three days and now has a metal plate in his head and lingering effects from the trauma.

In *The Rider*, we meet Brady soon after the incident, as he's taking the staples out of his own skull and adjusting, poorly, to a new life of caution, away from the energy and excitement and danger of the rodeo, which he had staked his identity on. Brady lives in a mobile home with his dad, Wayne (played by his real life father Tim Jandreau), who gambles and drinks too much but has a good heart, and teenage sister Lilly (also his real sister), who has Asperger's Syndrome.

Brady seems somewhat in denial and his friends don't seem to understand the gravity of the situation either.

"By NFL standards I should be dead," Brady explains one night out by the campfire, drinking with his buddies. But they respond to him like his injury is temporary, like he just needs to brush it off and power through the pain, "like a cowboy," one says.

Brady is clearly lost in this new reality. He understands more than most what life looks like after injury, often visiting his friend Lane (Lane Scott), a once daredevil who is in rehab and can no longer walk or speak after his rodeo accident.

Zhao clearly has a deep affection for her subjects who



SPIRITUAL WESTERN. This image shows Brady Jandreau in a scene from *The Rider*, Chloe Zhao's spiritual and poetic journey into the fading world of the Lakota cowboy. The film stars the real people who inspired her film. (Sony Pictures Classics via AP)

have so graciously let her into their lives, and, with almost documentary rigor, expose some of the difficult truths of life with disability. But there is also an abundance of grace and beauty within the hardships too.

Her use of non-actors is often a plus, but it has its limits too. Brady, while a deeply compelling and empathetic presence who from certain angles looks like a distant cousin to Chris Pratt, can appear a little blank at times when the camera just lingers on him in close-up. He's strongest, and most natural in his normal routine, training horses or interacting with Lane or Lilly.

Its examination of the cowboy masculinity that leads Brady and his peers to seek a life of thrills and danger only scratches the surface, but you'll be surprised at how intoxicating and enveloping it is, right down to the on-the-nose metaphors. *The Rider* is a story of death and rebirth and cements Zhao as one of the most promising and humane filmmakers to come on the scene in some time. Like Sean Baker, she takes her camera to parts of the country that many of us rarely see and even more rarely take the time to consider. Zhao and *The Rider* are the real deal.

The Rider, a Sony Pictures Classics release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "language and drug use." Running time: 103 minutes. Three stars out of four.

MPAA Definition of R: Restricted. Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian.

Zoo announces pregnancy of critically endangered orangutan

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — The Virginia Zoo has announced that one of its critically endangered Bornean orangutans is pregnant. The zoo in Norfolk said on its website that 18-year-old Dara is expected to have a baby this summer.

Virginia Zoo executive director Greg Bockheim said the zoo is playing a vital role in the species' future.

The animals are native to the island of Borneo in Southeast Asia. Their numbers have declined more than 50 percent because of poaching and habitat loss. They also have one of the slowest reproductive rates of all mammals. Bockheim said the birth is "tremendously significant."

Zoo keepers observed breeding behavior between Dara and 14-year-old male Solaris last fall. Pregnancies usually last about 245 days. She's expected to have the baby in mid-June or early July.

Couple sent to prison for distributing drugs

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — Federal prosecutors say a New Hampshire couple has been sentenced to prison for participating in a scheme to distribute more than 5,000 packages of misbranded prescription drugs obtained from India. Prosecutors say they conspired with others to receive pill shipments from India, many of which were controlled substances. The couple tried to have them shipped to post office boxes. A search warrant at their home resulted in the discovery of more than 100,000 pills.

Both 53-year-old John Hayes and 50-year-old Plabpleung Hayes of New Ipswich pleaded guilty to participating in a conspiracy to distribute the drugs, which weren't approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Hayes was sentenced to 2 1/2 years and his wife was sentenced to a year and a day. She faces possible deportation to Thailand afterward.

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA



■ Polo

Polo's "Talking Story" column will return soon.