

Norman Mineta, transportation secretary in 9/11 era, has died

By Brian Witte and Terence Chea
The Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Norman Y. Mineta, who broke racial barriers for Asian Americans serving in high-profile government posts and ordered commercial flights grounded after the 9/11 terror attacks as the nation's federal transportation secretary, passed away last month. He was 90 years old.

John Flaherty, Mineta's former chief of staff, said Mineta died peacefully at his home surrounded by family in Edgewater, Maryland, east of the nation's capital.

"His cause of death was a heart ailment," Flaherty added. "He was an extraordinary public servant and a very dear friend."

Mineta broke racial barriers for Asian Americans in becoming mayor of San Jose, California early in his political career. He later became the first Asian American to become a federal cabinet secretary, serving under both Democratic President Bill Clinton and Republican George W. Bush.

Bush went on to award Mineta the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In a statement, the former president said Mineta was "a wonderful American story about someone who overcame hardship and prejudice to serve in the United States Army, congress, and the cabinet of two Presidents."

"As my Secretary of Transportation, he showed great leadership in helping prevent further attacks on and after 9/11. As I said when presenting him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Norm has given his country a lifetime of service, and he's given his fellow citizens an example of leadership, devotion to duty, and personal character," the former president said.

The son of Japanese immigrants who



GROUNDBREAKING LEADER. Former U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta greets LYNX bus drivers and representatives during a tour of the LYNX bus facility in downtown Orlando, Florida, in this April 27, 2006 file photo. Mineta, who broke racial barriers for Asian Americans serving in high-profile government posts and ordered commercial flights grounded after the 9/11 terror attacks as the nation's federal transportation secretary, passed away last month. He was 90 years old. (AP Photo/Orlando Sentinel, Joe Burbank, File)

intelligence officer in Korea and Japan. After three years with the military, he returned to San Jose to run his father's Mineta Insurance Agency.

Mineta's foray into politics came in 1967, when San Jose's mayor tapped him to fill a vacant seat on the city council. He won re-election and served four more years on the council before winning the city's top seat in 1971, making him the first Asian-American mayor of a major city. It now has an airport that bears his name.

Mineta was elected to congress in 1974 and served 10 terms representing Silicon Valley. During his tenure, he pushed for more funding for the FAA and co-authored a landmark law that gave state and local governments control over highway and mass transit decisions.

The co-founder of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus also scored a personal victory when he helped win passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which required the U.S. government to apologize to the 120,000 Japanese Americans forced to live in wartime internment camps. Former internees also received reparations of \$20,000 each.

In 1993, Mineta became chairman of the House Public Works and Transportation Committee — another first — but he quickly lost that job after Republicans won control of the House in 1994.

Mineta resigned from congress in 1995

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spent two years of his childhood incarcerated at a World War II internment camp, Mineta began his political career leading his hometown of San Jose before joining the Clinton administration as commerce secretary and then crossing party lines to serve in Bush's cabinet.

As Bush's transportation secretary, Mineta led the department during the crisis of September 11, 2001, as hijacked commercial airliners barrelled toward U.S. landmarks. After a second plane crashed into the World Trade Center, Mineta ordered the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to ground all civilian aircraft — more than 4,500 in flight at the time. It was the first such order given in U.S. aviation history.

Mineta was subsequently tasked with restoring confidence in air travel in the aftermath of the terror attacks. He oversaw the hasty creation of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which took over responsibility for aviation security from the airlines.

Within a year, the TSA had hired tens of

thousands of airport screeners, put air marshals on commercial flights, and installed high-tech equipment to screen air travellers and their luggage for bombs.

The effort was derided at the time for wasteful spending and causing long lines at airports. But Mineta, widely liked and respected in Washington for his deep knowledge of transportation issues, managed to escape the brunt of that criticism.

In 2006, he resigned at age 74 after five-and-a-half years in his post, making him the longest-serving transportation secretary since the agency was created in 1967.

Born on November 12, 1931, Norman Yoshio Mineta was 10 years old and wearing his Cub Scouts uniform when he and his parents were transported to be incarcerated in Wyoming after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

He went on to graduate from the University of California, Berkeley, with a bachelor's degree in business administration and served as an Army



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