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CHIEF OF THE MODOC NATION WALKS ON

(MIAMI, OKLAHOMA, October 15) --- The family of the longest serving Chief of the Modoc Nation has announced the passing of Chief Bill G. Follis. The Chief died peacefully at Mercy Hospital in Joplin, Missouri on Friday, October 14, 2022. He was 89.

Born in Joplin, Missouri to Judd and Nita (Walker) Follis, Bill was a lifelong resident of Miami, Oklahoma. After graduating from Miami High School, he attended Northeastern Oklahoma A&M pursuing his education in animal husbandry. From there he continued to pursue his degree at Oklahoma State University, where he found his desire to continue as an accomplished all-around rodeo cowboy and the requirement to attend class to be at odds. Not wanting to tell his mother that he was not making grades, he assessed his options and decided to join the Navy. A life decision that his mother did not know until he called her from the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida. Bill served as a naval aviator.

After his military obligation, he returned to Miami and met his wife of 65 years, Ms. Janet Bennett, they returned to Stillwater and Bill earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science. Moving back to Miami, Bill and Janet raised their two sons, Billy and Phillip. He worked at the Clear Creek Ranch in Welch, Oklahoma and developed the foundation breed of Brangus cattle and would also go on to work as a loan officer. Developing his entrepreneurial skills, Bill purchased and operated a recycling business on the truck route in Miami. His other interests included ranching and raising Quarter Horses, where he was an accomplished owner-trainer.

An extraordinary leader, Bill was a champion for the Modoc people. He began his tenure as Chief of the Tribe in 1972, and was instrumental in the restoration of Modoc Nation to federal recognition in 1978. He served as Chief for nearly 50 years - an incredible tenure of its own in modern tribal leadership. Through more than 12 consecutive terms in office, Chief Follis oversaw the growth of the Modoc Nation as a government and the establishment of numerous support programs for the Modoc people.

In the years that followed the restored recognition, the Modoc government was continuously underfunded by the federal government; only being distributed a mere \$8,000 a year to operate an office and provide for the education and welfare of the Modoc people. From that meager amount

in the early days, and through dedication and persistence, Bill and the members of the Modoc Elected Council were able to establish the foundations for the Tribe's economic development.

Chief Billy Friend of the Wyandotte Nation said, "Chief Bill Follis was a fierce advocate for the Modoc Nation and all of Indian Country during his lifetime. His leadership helped build the foundation of success that the Modoc Nation enjoys today." He added, "We will definitely miss Chief Follis, but he leaves behind a great legacy that will impact the next seven generations of the Modoc people."

In addition to his service as Chief, Bill was a pillar in the community of Miami and in the State of Oklahoma. He served on various boards, including the Oklahoma State University Foundation, Rogers State University, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Task Force under the Administrations of Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, the Claremore Indian Hospital, the Northeastern Indian Tribal Health Clinic, and served as Chairman of the Oklahoma Commission on Indian Affairs. He worked with a nationwide collective of Tribal leaders, U.S. Presidents and Cabinet Members, Supreme Court Justices, State Governors, and countless elected officials at all levels.

"Chief Follis was not only a great leader, but he was a fine gentleman." said Choctaw Nation Chief, Gary Batton. "Always kind and gentle, but was very firm in his values and commitment to his tribal members and Indian Country."

In 2008, Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry and Miami Mayor Brent Brassfield proclaimed September 25th as "Chief Bill G. Follis Day" in the State of Oklahoma and the town of Miami for his years of service. In 2016 he received the Distinguished Alumni Award from the Oklahoma State Alumni Association and the American Indian Alumni Society.

Shawnee Chief Ron Sparkman who knew Follis for several years remarked, "Chief Follis was very tribal oriented and always worked to promote tribal sovereignty and the Indian Community." Through working with local, state, federal, and tribal leaders, Chief Follis negotiated a joint-compact to open the Stables Casino. This joint-compact was the first such agreement approved by the National Indian Gaming Commission and the Secretary of Interior. As Chief, he established several other economic ventures to benefit the Modoc Nation for generations to come.

Chairman Rocky Barrett of the Citizens Band Potawatomi regarded Chief Follis as "quite a remarkable man; one minute he was a diplomat, and the next thing you knew it, he was all cowboy." He added, "He did an awful lot of good for the Modoc people and Indian Country, even despite the federal government who at times would refuse to work with him."

Education, health initiatives, child and elder care, and housing support programs were at the forefront of his priorities and his accomplished benefits to the Modoc people. His efforts have seen

many first generation students and graduate students achieve great accomplishments academically and professionally. A common saying from the Chief was “we will give you a hand up, but not a handout.” This sentiment was expressed to convey his hope for recipients to continue working toward their own self sufficiency, so that others may have the same opportunity in the future.

Outside of tribal and civic service, he was devoted husband, a father, a grandfather, and a great-grandfather. His greatest joys and pride were derived from his family. While his accomplishments were great, he made sure that everyone else knew the achievements of his family before his own. His legacy will loom large in the pages of Modoc history, in the story of Indian Country, and in the Follis family. He will forever be remembered as a founding father and a hero to the Modoc people in the same breath as Captain Jack and Scarfaced Charley.

Details on the arrangements for a celebration life honoring Chief Follis will be released by the family at a later date.