

Manton... quest for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.
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“Congressman Manton was a lifelong New Yorker who treasured his service to his city, state and country. Before becoming a successful lawyer and respected congressman, Tom Manton served in the United States Marine Corps as a flight navigator and as an officer in the New York City Police Department. Highly respected and beloved by all he touched as an honest and hardworking public servant, he will surely be missed. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife Diane and their four children Catherine, Thomas, John and Jeanne, as well as the rest of the Manton family during these difficult times.”

Pataki ordered that flags across New York state be lowered to half-staff on Friday, July 28 in recognition of Manton’s service to the people of the state. City officials had directed that flags on municipal buildings be flown at half-staff starting on Monday and going through Friday as well.

Among others commenting on Manton’s death, state Senator John Sabini (D-Jackson Heights) stated, “Tom Manton was a Democratic chair who opened up the party to new opportunities for women, African Americans, Hispanics and Asians. He leaves the legacy of a diverse roster of Democratic officials.”

Sabini served very briefly as Queens Democratic chairman following Donald Manes’ death and Manton’s election as his permanent successor.

Assemblymember Michael Gianaris (D-Astoria) declared, “The party organization has been one of the most unified in the state of New York and has been very inclusive of the diverse population of Queens.”

Queens Borough President Helen Marshall said she would “never forget his support for me during my campaigns” for elective office.

“He helped me become the first minority and the second woman to attain this current post. It was his idea to designate at-large [Democratic] district leaders,” she said, “and he played a significant role in campaigns that elected Hispanics to public offices.”

She characterized Manton as “conciliatory and statesman like” and “a gentle man and an effective leader for all the people of our borough.”

Assemblymember Brian McLaughlin (D-Flushing), who’s also a labor leader, said in a statement, “Today, the labor community of New York City mourns the passing of a good friend. Tom Manton had a long and distinguished record of leadership in our communities, and we will always be grateful for his untiring commitment to the interests of our working families and retirees. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family at this sad time.”

Manton died last Saturday evening following a brief stay in Calvary Hospital in The Bronx. His family did not reveal the cause of death. He had been ill for several months, according to reports.

Manton was born in Manhattan on Nov.

3, 1932, the only son of Irish immigrant parents who soon after moved the family to Astoria, where he lived, and raised his family until his death. He attended St. Joseph’s School in Astoria and St. John’s Preparatory School in Brooklyn. In 1951 he enlisted in the United States Marines during the Korean War, serving as a flight navigator until his discharge in 1953.

He became a New York City police officer in 1955, walking a beat in Harlem, while attending night sessions at St. John’s University in Jamaica Estates, from which he graduated in 1958. Two years later he quit the Police Department and in 1962 received a law degree from St. John’s University.

Manton then took a job as a salesman with IBM, at the same time getting involved in local politics in Woodside and Sunnyside. In 1969, he ran for public office for the first time. He was elected to the city council in 1970, representing a Woodside/Sunnyside district.

In 1972 and 1978, he entered and lost Democratic primaries in the same area. On the latter occasion, he was a strong favorite to win, but ran into a political newcomer, Geraldine Ferraro, who upset Manton in the primary and went on to defeat Republican Alfred Delli Bori in the general election, another upset.

When Ferraro, after three terms, left Congress to run for vice president of the United States, Manton ran for the vacated seat and finally became a Congressman. He held the seat until 1998.

When he decided to retire, he did so at a time when no primary could be held to replace him. Instead, his Committee on Vacancies chose Joseph Crowley to be his hand-picked replacement. This caused a schism in the Queens organization as Manton’s erstwhile close friend and political ally, Councilmember Walter McCaffrey, also wanted to succeed Manton. However, McCaffrey bit the bullet and followed Manton’s plan to support Crowley for the post.

Meanwhile, Manton had been elected chairman of the Queens Democratic organization following Donald Manes’ suicide in early 1986. He held the position until last Saturday.

The Dems will have to replace Manton quickly, since the political calendar is moving forward and the primary elections are scheduled for September 12, with the general elections following in November.

Manton is survived by his wife, Diane, a retired nurse, and their four children: Cathy Manton Laurent of Schenectady; Thomas K. Manton of London, England; John T. Manton of Woodside, and Jeanne Manton of Astoria. Four grandchildren also survive him.

Manton’s wake will be at the Lynch Funeral Home, at 43-07 Queens Blvd., Sunnyside today and tomorrow from 2 to 5 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m. A funeral mass will be held at St. Sebastian Roman Catholic Church in Woodside at 11 a.m. on Friday. Burial at Calvary Cemetery on Queens Boulevard in Woodside will follow.

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