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City of Duluth Communications Office

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SUBJECT: City Councilor Renee Van Nett

BY: Phil Jents, Communications and Policy Officer

City Councilor Renee Van Nett

[Duluth, MN] It is with the heaviest of hearts the City of Duluth shares that Fourth District City Councilor Renee Van Nett passed away today surrounded by family and friends in Duluth after a brief battle with a terminal illness.

Councilor Van Nett was elected in 2017 and re-elected in 2021. She served as the Council Vice President in 2020 and Council President in 2021.

Mayor Emily Larson's Statement

"Renee Van Nett was an incredibly powerful woman who lived life with clarity and purpose. An absolute straight talker who knew her values, she also knew her voice. And the importance of using it. Time and again she was fearless. I will truly and deeply miss her as a friend to call on and laugh with through the brutal work of local politics.

Our entire community benefitted from her groundbreaking leadership as the first Indigenous woman elected to the Duluth City Council in the city's history, going on to serve as Council President, DEDA Commissioner and Public Safety Chair. Renee was also a founding member of the Duluth Citizen Review Board and was an all-around truth teller."

City Council President Arik Forsman's Statement

"My heart breaks at the loss of my close friend and colleague, Renee. Councilor Van Nett was the bravest person I've ever met. She overcame immense obstacles in her life to become the first city councilor of Native American heritage to be elected Council President in Duluth. Renee dedicated her career to improving the lives of working people and cared deeply for her brothers and sisters in Labor. She was very proud of her father's service as an Ironworker and it touched her deeply to recently be made a member of Ironworkers Local 512, as well as Teamsters Local 346 and Duluth Firefighters Local 101.

Renee's deepest passion on the city council has always been public safety. She served for many years as the Council Public Safety Chair and always fought to get our firefighters and police officers the resources they needed to keep Duluthians safe. She had a backbone of steel and was instrumental in many measures that passed the council during her tenure, including her historic resolution acknowledging the traumatic history of American Indian boarding schools in our state and supporting efforts of reconciliation.

Renee was an inspiration to many and her legacy will live on for generations to come in Duluth. I will profoundly and deeply miss her, as many throughout our community will as well."

Details about memorial services will be released publicly by the city in the coming days. A GoFundMe has been set up in Renee's honor at (https://www.gofundme.com/f/9f7fq2-renee-van-nett-family?utm_source=customer&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_campaign=p_cf+share-flow-1&fbclid=IwAR3fQsuyQAs3QGipQhg5PVoqd7p4aFUYngKqtwF_Pgg-BNsQPyhYE4t8zhw). All proceeds will go toward her final expenses and to care for Renee's two loving daughters, Tia and Nevada.

Per the city charter, the council must take up a resolution to determine a process for making an appointment for the 4th District City Council seat.

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