

Bishop Kicanas recalls McCain's legacy of service, bipartisanship

TUCSON, Ariz. — Retired Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas of Tucson praised Arizona Sen. John S. McCain, who died at age 81 of brain cancer Aug. 25, for his service to the nation.

“He was a very principled man who had a passion for service,” Bishop Kicanas told the Catholic Outlook, newspaper of the Tucson Diocese, Aug. 27.

The two worked together on immigration reform issues, especially in 2007, when McCain was trying to balance the political pressures of securing the Republican nomination for the 2008 presidential election with his bipartisan attempts at immigration reform.

Bishop Kicanas recalled an office visit in which McCain challenged him to help activate Hispanic and other voters to lobby congressional offices on behalf of immigration reform. “‘I’m getting a call every minute of every day against it,’ he (McCain) said. ‘We need to get your people to speak up,’” the bishop said of the exchange.

Political pressure inevitably doomed the effort.

McCain believed in American principles — such as hard work, cooperation and protecting human dignity — and that sharing those with the world made the world safer.

“He was a tough competitor, but he also understood that we cannot achieve success (global stability) by ourselves,” Bishop Kicanas said.

McCain frequently met foreign leaders and discussed deployment of U.S. troops and military options. Bishop Kicanas also traveled on behalf of Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services, often to sites where civic unrest and war created refugee crises. Although the two leaders never traveled together, they often shared the same goals: protection of human rights and global security.

“We shared a concern about many of the areas of challenge around the world,” the bishop said.

McCain’s efforts, especially in his latter years, to bridge partisanship on important issues such as campaign finance reform, are examples of how much he valued a united drive to achieve a greater good. “He believed we could work together even though we have our differences.”

“He believed in coming together to discuss our differences. In that way, he was very much like Pope Francis,” Bishop Kicanas added. “That’s a message that’s important for all of us to heed.”

In 2013, the bishop attended an interfaith forum on immigration reform at the United Methodist Church in Casa Grande, Arizona.

“The religious voice has an important role on immigration reform,” Bishop Kicanas said at that forum. “This is the time to move forward as a nation ... attentive to the dignity of all human life.”

McCain said at that time that about 70 percent of Arizona residents supported immigration reform for more than 11 million undocumented immigrants.

“We insist on a path to citizenship,” he said. “There are economic benefits. It’s a 10-year plan for a green card; it’s not amnesty.”

However, attempts for immigration reform that year also were unsuccessful.

The Arizona Catholic Conference noted McCain’s passing in an Aug. 27 statement.

“John McCain is an American hero who served his country with the utmost admiration in both the Navy and the U.S. Senate. His patriotism and dedicated service will long be remembered for generations to come,” the conference said.

“Although he will be remembered by all Americans, we are fortunate as Arizonans that we can call Sen. McCain one of our own.

“As we approach the upcoming memorial services this week, we will continue to pray for the repose of his soul and that his entire family receive the graces they need

in this difficult time,” it said.

The statement was signed by bishops from the conference’s member dioceses: Tucson Bishop Edward J. Weisenburger, Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted and Auxiliary Bishop Eduardo A. Nevares, both of Phoenix, and Bishop James S. Wall of Gallup, New Mexico.

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