

## ARKANSAS ATOLL – CLOSING EPISODE

[Theme music begins]

Shane White (00:18):

We're at the end of 2020, a year that has brought challenge after challenge. The production of this podcast took place right before and during the pandemic. We came to know the characters in these stories, and we know that they were all affected in one way or another. Marshallese have suffered half the deaths in Arkansas from COVID-19 while making up no more than 3% of the region's population. The community has lost over 50 members as of November. Melisa Laelan is the executive director at the Arkansas Coalition of Marshallese, and she says, "If you've forgotten how impactful it is, you just have to look at the graves, and it tells you that this thing is large." The deadly reality of COVID-19 can be seen in the new graves of the Friendship Cemetery in Springdale, Arkansas, the final resting place for many Marshallese who died from the coronavirus.

(01:07): On July 20th, 2020, Faith and Neisen Laukon, contributors to this podcast, lost their father and husband, Adelbert. He was in the hospital for over a month and a half before he died from COVID-19 complications. Adelbert was married to Neisen for 48 years. The father of seven, former church pastor, and employee of Tyson Foods. Our hearts go out to the family and the rest of the Springdale Marshallese community as they grieve their losses.

(01:36): Throughout the pandemic, Compact of Free Association community members have continued to work on behalf of all. As meat-processing workers like Neisen and Adelbert, as care providers, as transportation workers, and as social workers. Despite being taxpayers and essential workers, the Marshallese and the other CoFA communities are not eligible for Medicaid. At all times, but especially during the pandemic, this affects already at-risk populations by restricting access and affordability to needed health care. In addition to increasing health care assistance during the pandemic, the restoration of Medicaid for CoFA communities will decrease hospital bills, increase preventative care, and improve the overall health of communities. Health equity for CoFA communities should not be an issue. It's a basic human right. There's currently a change.org petition circulating to restore Medicaid eligibility for CoFA communities.

(02:25): We would like to offer our sincerest gratitude to the Marshallese community for their participation in the Arkansas Atoll podcast, and we'd like to dedicate this series to Adelbert Laukon, his daughter, Faith, and his wife, Neisen.

[Theme song begins]

Shane White (02:47):

Arkansas Atoll is a production of the Arkansas Story Vault project at The David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History, Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas. Shane White, Neba Evans, Obed Lamy, Octavia Rolle, and Sam Whitesell are the student producers for this podcast series. Sarah K. Moore and Colleen Thurston are the staff and faculty advisors to the project, with the guidance of Dr. William Schwab. Funding for this Arkansas Story Vault project was provided by a generous donation from the Walton Family Foundation. Our sincerest gratitude is extended to the Marshallese community of Northwest Arkansas for sharing their stories with us. For ways to support them during the COVID-19 crisis, visit [impactnwa.org](http://impactnwa.org). That's [impactnwa.org](http://impactnwa.org). The theme song used for this podcast series, and so that I don't butcher the correct pronunciation, in Mr. Tibon's own words is titled:

Jorelik Tibon (03:48):

Jiduul im Kaddol

Shane White:

We'd like to extend our many thanks to Mr. Jorelik Tibon and producer Scott Stege for their musical contribution.

[Theme song continues] (04:29)

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