

## **Morehouse School of Medicine President and Dean Statement on the Passing of Congressman Louis Stokes**



Today Morehouse School of Medicine mourns the passing of one of our nation's most revered health equity leaders, Congressman Louis Stokes, whose dedication to the health equity movement resulted in tremendous federal attention to this issue. Having trained as a lawyer, Congressman Stokes became a fierce advocate for civil rights, health care access, and promoted economic, educational, and social issues that were important to underserved, marginalized and neglected communities.

As the first African American congressman from Ohio, he joined with 12 other African American leaders to establish the Congressional Black Caucus, which was intended to be the conscience of the Congress and the voice for minority and vulnerable communities. As the fledgling caucus took root, Congressman Stokes and his colleagues in the CBC recognized the need to establish a health brain trust to help the caucus navigate the complex health care and public health issues affecting African Americans and other vulnerable populations.

Through his leadership, major changes in law and policy were achieved to increase health opportunities for everyone: from the establishment of health professional pipeline programs such as Health Careers Opportunity Programs and Area Health Education Centers, to increased funding for research on minority health and health disparities, to community-based programs such as CDC's REACH program, which is intended to address health disparities in urban, rural and frontier communities across the United States.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible were it not for the Congressman's tenacity, shrewdness, and unparalleled negotiation skills. Because of his leadership, Congress passed and President George H.W. Bush signed into law the first minority health bill in over 120 years, the Disadvantaged Minority Health Improvement Act of 1990, which established the Office of Minority Health as a permanent entity within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This office helped to ensure that policies and programs at the department addressed issues impacting minorities.

Congressman Stokes was, indeed, a national treasure and a light from which many have been lit. His impact on health law and policy is immeasurable. In the end, he will forever be remembered for giving much more to this country than he took from her; for carrying the health equity torch for so long; and for being a caring and compassionate person.

Our prayers, thoughts and condolences are with his wife, his children, and the entire Stokes family.

- Dr. Valerie Montgomery Rice, President and Dean, Morehouse School of Medicine