A Tribute to the Honorable Louis Stokes

September, 2015

With the passing of the Honorable Louis Stokes, The Sullivan Alliance lost one of its most revered members.

Lou Stokes served in the U.S. House of Representatives for 30 years, where he provided strong leadership and support for a number of health programs, including the report “Black and Minority Health” (1985, commonly referred to as the “Heckler Report,” in honor of U.S. Secretary Margaret Heckler).

Congressman Stokes provided congressional leadership to create the position of Director, Office of Minority Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1985. And he introduced legislation to create the Research Centers at Minority Institutions (RCMI) program at National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 1986.

In 1990, during my tenure as U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, he supported my initiative creating the Office for Research in Minority Health at the NIH. This office became the National Center for Research in Minority Health and Health Disparities in 2001 and, in 2010, the “Center” became the National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities.

Congressman Stokes was a strong supporter of health institutions as a member of the House Committee on Appropriations, providing leadership for a number of programs focusing on minority health and health disparities, such as the research endowment program for minority institutions, the centers of excellence program, the Title III program (Section 326) in the Higher Education Act, and many others. Congressman Stokes also chaired the House Committee on Ethics, and the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs of the House Appropriations Committee.

After retiring from the Congress, Lou Stokes served on the board of the Sullivan Commission on Minority Health (2003-2004) and on the board of The Sullivan Alliance (2005-2015), providing guidance and support of our efforts to increase racial and ethnic diversity in the nation’s health professions.

To honor his public service, there are also buildings named for Congressman Stokes at the National Institutes of Health, at Howard University Library, the VA Hospital in Cleveland and others.

Most of all, we will miss Lou Stokes’ sense of optimism, his collegiality, his great sense of humor and his strong commitment to public service. Lou Stokes has given us a strong legacy of public service, particularly for those who are disadvantaged socioeconomically.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to his wife, Jay, to his children, and other members of the Stokes family.

Louis W. Sullivan, M.D.
Chairman, The Sullivan Alliance to Transform the Health Professions
U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, 1989-1993