

I hope my colleagues in a very big bipartisan way will vote for this legislation, support it, and hopefully get it signed into law before this year is out.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BROWN). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO JOHN STROGER

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, tomorrow, the city of Chicago and Cook County, IL, will say goodbye to a legend.

John Stroger was born into poverty in Arkansas at the start of the Great Depression. He lived to become the first African American ever elected president of the Board of Commissioners of Cook County, IL. He lived to be one of the most powerful politicians in my home State.

He died at 8 o'clock last Friday morning from complications of a stroke he suffered almost 2 years ago and from which he never fully recovered.

John Stroger was 78 years old.

Mayor Daley confirmed the passing of John Stroger at a prayer breakfast on that day when we were honoring Dr. Martin Luther King. What a fitting coincidence. Dr. King had told us:

Everybody can be great, because everyone can serve.

John Stroger spent his life serving.

John Stroger was a grandson of former slaves who believed in the promise of America and believed that government can and should be a force for progress.

He was a man of compassion, integrity, great humor, and great political skill. He used all of those qualities to help others.

He spent his political life breaking down racial barriers and working to lift up those who were less fortunate. His lifelong commitment to serve those who struggle every day to find affordable, quality medical care will certainly be his legacy.

Many years ago, John Stroger befriended me when I was an unknown candidate from Springfield with a few friends in the Chicago political world. For me, John Stroger was more than an ally. He was a great friend.

He was also a man of strong opinions. Our mutual friend, Congressman DANNY DAVIS of Illinois, once joked that John Stroger "would argue with a signpost." But he never held grudges. He was a real gentleman.

He was also a champion for working families and the poor. As Cook County board president from 1994 to 2006, John Stroger opened doors of opportunity in government and business for women and minorities and improved the county's bond rating.

He made county government more responsive by changing the way commissioners are elected.

He created a special domestic violence court.

And then there is the achievement of which he was probably most proud: the construction in the year 2002 of a state-of-the-art hospital to serve the poor, the uninsured, and the underserved of Cook County and the Chicagoland area.

At a time when public hospitals across America are having to turn people away, John Stroger still believed that every person deserved the dignity and security of basic health care and lifesaving medicine.

The Chicago Sun Times noted:

John Stroger was so much larger than life they did not even wait until he was dead to put his name on the Cook County Hospital he defied the critics to build.

The John H. Stroger Hospital of Cook County, IL, is just one way that the legacy of this remarkable man will continue to serve the people and city he loved for years to come.

Mr. President, I remember when John Stroger decided that this hospital was going to be built. There were scores of critics. Why in the world would we want to build a hospital for poor people? John Stroger knew the answer to that question. It was an answer from his heart: Because that is what America does. America cares for the poor. America provides the poor in Cook County and all across our Nation with the same kind of quality care that we all want for our families.

John Stroger knew that. His battle for that hospital ended up in one of the great success stories of public life in Illinois.

John Stroger was born in 1929 in Helena, AR—the oldest of four kids. His father was a tailor, his mother worked as a maid. The family lived in a three-room shack with no electricity and no indoor plumbing.

John Stroger later described it for a Sun Times reporter when he said: "We didn't have any boots, and we didn't have any straps."

He graduated from Xavier College in New Orleans in 1952 with a degree in business administration. He was proud of Xavier for the last day I ever spoke to him. He always spoke with great pride about that college. He moved back to Arkansas and spent a year teaching high school math and coaching basketball. When he came home one day, his mom had packed a suitcase. She told him she had arranged for

him to move to Chicago because there would be more opportunities for a young black man.

John Stroger had caught the political bug years earlier. After hearing a speaker in Arkansas say that the election of President Harry Truman would lead to full rights for African Americans, he had organized voters and tried to persuade them to pay the poll tax so they could vote.

In Chicago, there was no poll tax, but there were other obstacles to full political participation for African Americans in the 1950s. Over the next four decades, John Stroger fought them all.

In 1968, he was named Democratic committeeman for South Side's Eighth ward—the first African-American committeeman for that famous ward. Two years later, John was elected to the Cook County Board. In 1994, he became board president. He was running for his fourth term in 2006 when he suffered a stroke a week before the primary.

John was my friend. The last picture we had taken together was at the St. Patrick's Day march, a legendary march in Chicago. There was John, with his big smile and big green sash, standing next to me and Mayor Daley. I am going to treasure that photo. I think it was one of the last taken of John as a candidate.

After he suffered a stroke, the Chicago Tribune ran an editorial that read, in part:

If John Stroger ever anticipated a career farewell, he surely saw himself shaking hands with everyone—his allies, his adversaries, the bypassers captivated if only for a moment by one of the more genuine personalities in Chicago politics.

The Tribune went on to write:

But he likely didn't anticipate a farewell. He wouldn't have enjoyed those elaborate exercises in staged finality. Politics and governance were his life; an intimate says the prospect of retirement unnerved him. Even in this awkward moment, we know he leaves public office just as he occupied it: Without a grudge, without a complaint, and with precious few regrets.

Those were the words of the Chicago Tribune, not always John Stroger's political friend.

The mayor and Members of Congress and the city council and even a former President of the United States have praised John Stroger's life and legacy these past days—and rightly so. But I think the eulogy John Stroger would have liked best wasn't offered by a politician.

Clyde Black runs a shoeshine operation in the City Hall-County Building complex in Chicago. Years ago, John Stroger gave him a helping hand to start his little business. As word of President Stroger's death spread last Friday, Clyde Black told a reporter:

He changed my life—made me a better person. He's someone we all dearly miss a lot.

It is a sentiment I and many others share.

I offer my deep condolences to President Stroger's family, especially his wife Yonnie. What a wonderful woman, by his side throughout his political life