

Written by Kathy

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By Cleveland Urban News. Com Field Reporter Johnette Jernigan and Editor-in-Chief Kathy Wray Coleman. Cleveland Urban News.Com and its affiliated blog, the Kathy Wray Coleman Online News Blog.Com, are Ohio's most read Black newspaper and Black newspaper blog Blog. Coleman is a 22-year journalist who trained for 17 years at the Call and Post Newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio covering various topics, including racial discrimination in housing, education, and politics. She also covered Stokes as a congressman and greater Cleveland's most esteemed politician.

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CLEVELAND, Ohio-Funeral services were held Tuesday morning, August 25, for former longtime congressman Louis Stokes (pictured), Ohio's first Black congressman who died on August 18 at his home in Shaker Heights after a brave battle with lung and brain cancer.

He was 90-years-old, and his death comes as the 2016 presidential election nears.

And all eyes are on Cleveland, and the pivotal state of Ohio, as city officials prepare to host the 2016 Republican National Convention next year.

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Hundreds of people packed Olivet Institutional Baptist Church on Cleveland's majority Black east side to say farewell to the longtime federal lawmaker who represented Cleveland and several of its eastern suburbs of Cuyahoga County in Washington, serving 15 terms in the U.S. House of Representatives until retiring in 1998. Thereafter, he worked as an executive attorney at the Washington D.C. office of the prominent law firm of Squires, Sanders and Dempsey.

It was the political who's who of Ohio, mainly Democrats like Stokes himself, though prominent elected officials that are Republican were also there.

"The congressman's reach went beyond the Democratic Party," said Lillian Sharpley, the deputy executive director of the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party. "He was an asset in so many ways."

Vice President Joe Biden, a former U.S. senator and a potential contender for the Democratic nomination for president in spite of Hillary Clinton's front-runner status, was the most prominent dignitary there. He paused to view Stokes' body, and then offered condolences to the family, including Stokes' wife of 55 years, Jay Stokes, and Cleveland Municipal Court Judge Angela Stokes, one of the congressman's four grown children.

Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson, and 11 councilpersons Mamie Mitchell, T.J. Dow, Phyllis Cleveland, Zack Reed and Jeff Johnson, were there too, as were 11 Cuyahoga County Councilwoman Yvonne Conwell, and state Reps. John Barnes Jr., Stephanie Howse and Nickie Antonio.

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Other elected officials that paid their respects include Republican Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine, Toledo Mayor Paula Hicks-Hudson, and Akron City Council President Mike Williams, also a candidate for Akron mayor.

A population-based redistricting map drawn by the state legislature in 2011 reduced the state's congressional seats from 18 to 16 and also drew in staggering suburbs of Summit County to the 11th congressional district, as well as a majority Black pocket of Akron, a majority White city of some 200,000 people that is situated some 35 miles south of Cleveland.

Congresswoman Marcia L. Fudge, a Warrensville Heights Democrat and Clinton endorser who now leads the 11th congressional district that Stokes once led, was the keynote speaker, and represented a delegation from Washington, D.C., among them U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown and Republican Rob Portman of Ohio, and longtime Black U.S. Reps Maxine Waters of California and Charles Rangel of New York.

One of two Black in Congress from Ohio, Fudge said during her speech, which drew a standing ovation, that she was blessed to have first a mentor/mentee relationship with Stokes and that their "friendship continued without interruption until the day of his death."

The congresswoman said that Stokes was a role model supreme and that "if Lou Stokes is not in heaven, most of us can forget about it."

A Cleveland Democrat who attended the funeral with his father, John Barnes Sr., a former Cleveland Ward 1 councilman, state Rep. Barnes Jr. told Cleveland Urban News.Com, Ohio's most read digital Black newspaper, that the large turn out was representative of the congressman's undying service to the American people in general, and the greater Cleveland community in particular.

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"People came out to pay their respects to Congressman Stokes," said Barnes Jr.. "It was a wonderful service."

Former Cleveland mayors Dennis Kucinich, Michael R. White and Jane Campbell were there, as was Blaine Griffin, the director of the community relations board for the city of Cleveland, and vice chair of the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party.

Kucinich is also a former congressman, and Campbell, the city's first and only female mayor, succeeded White, a former state senator and a three-term Black mayor like current mayor Frank Jackson, a former city council president who succeeded Campbell.

"Today we say good-bye to a friend and a giant in the community," White told Cleveland Urban News.Com, Ohio's most read digital Black newspaper.

Olivet senior pastor the Rev Dr. Jawanza Colvin gave remarks, among others, and the articulate Rev Dr Otis Moss Jr., a Civil Rights icon who marched with the Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, and pastor-emeritus at Olivet, delivered the eulogy.

A prestigious Morehouse College graduate who tapped Colvin, also a brilliant orator, to succeed him as pastor, Moss preached that Stokes achieved greatness during a turbulent period of national unrest that was accompanied by "racial inequality, segregation and injustice."

Dr. Delos "Toby Cosgrove," president and CEO of Cleveland Clinic hospitals, who also attended the services, also spoke to Cleveland Urban News.Com, and said that Stokes was "a great man and a good friend."

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That sentiment was echoed by Marsha Mockeebee, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Cleveland, who lauded Stokes as "a momentous leader in the community."

Cleveland Wards 5 resident Juanita Hewlett,66, said that Stokes believed in higher education, and helped poor Black people and others in his congressional district earn scholarships for college, and to study abroad.

Stokes was a World War 11 veteran and decided to run for Congress in 1968 at the urging of his younger brother Carl, then the mayor of Cleveland, and the first Black mayor of a major American city.

During his eulogy Moss also recounted the rise of the Stokes brothers from children growing up in the Outwaite Homes, the Cleveland's first federally-funded housing projects, to political power-brokers and unselfish community servants with local, statewide and national and international influence.

Local Black community activists, led by longtime activist Art McKoy,

stood ground in the hallway of the church during the service with flags colored red, black and green to salute Stokes.

Burial services were private.

Former Ohio Congressman Louis Stokes is laid to rest, Vice President Joe Biden and Congresspersons M

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