

It is with honor, humility, and on behalf of so many that I offer these remarks about Professor Stuart Altman. These remarks are informed by Deans, faculty, staff, students, policy makers and researchers.

My name is Michael Doonan, I teach in the PhD and MPP program at Heller and study national and state health care reform and policy. In short, I study Stuart Altman. Stuart recently became emeritus as the Sol C. Chaikin Professor of National Health Policy. He passed away on January 1, 2026 in North Carolina, following a brief illness. He was 88.

His niece Stacey Stein said, “He was such an amazing and special human, a brilliant mind, a visionary, an indomitable spirit, and just the most humble and generous person you could ever meet.”

Many don’t know that Stuart grew up in a family of modest means in The Bronx. While he was going to the City University of New York, he was a door-to-door Fuller brush salesperson. And he said he was pretty good at it! Even back then I imagine it was hard to say NO to Stuart.

He would move on to get his master’s and PhD in economics from UCLA. By his mid-thirties he would have a senior position in the Nixon administration in charge of price controls for the entire health care system.

President Levine speaks of one foot in the classroom one foot in the streets. On his path to be a health care policy giant, Stuart had one foot in the classroom and one foot in the halls of power in DC and state capitals. He advised five Presidents, numerous Governors, and members of Congress including Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

I first knew of Dr. Altman when I worked in the US Senate. He regularly testified and sometimes held special briefings for staff. When looking for a PhD program, Brandeis’ Heller was my first choice because of Dr. Altman. Little did I know how important he would become in my life.

Stuart was Dean of the Heller School several times and was interim University President from 1990 to 1991. He built Heller into a top ranked school of social policy and health policy juggernaut. With Stan

Wallack and then Connie Horgan, the Schneider Institutes of Health Policy became a world class research center. He was on committees to select University Presidents, Deans and the Stuart Altman Chair, Karen Donelan.

Stuart was President and a founding member of Academy Health. Chair of the Prospective Payment Assessment Commission, which advises Congress on funding mechanisms for Medicare. Recognized by so many state and national organizations including the National Academy of Medicine. Well published, he was also regularly quoted in places like the NYTimes, Washington Post, Boston Globe and on national and local TV and radio.

At one point he received so many speaking invitations his executive assistant, Ann Cummings at the time, kept upping his rate. He was up to \$25K for a lunch speech.

Stuart was an economist, but I always said he also practiced political science without a license. Stuart was a major power broker with a rare combination of intellect, interpersonal and communications skills. He was a super connector. He knew thousands of people and tens of thousands knew him.

Stuart was appointed the first chair of the Massachusetts health policy Commission by Democrat Deval Patrick and reappointed by Republican Charlie Baker. His annual Princeton conference is so impactful because it includes leaders across parties and sector of health care system. They all have one thing in common: admiration, respect and friendship with Stuart Altman. As an aspiring health policy wonk, I had to pinch myself as the who's who of health policy would gravitate around Stuart at the bar after the day's sessions.

Stuart's success came from communicating complex ideas, storytelling, reading the room and making friends on both sides of the aisle. But if you knew Stuart, he was no pushover and always held tight to his values. If you really knew Stuart you would see that gleam in his eye, often when he was up to something.

A colleague said "he never shied away from speaking kindly while also being candid, brilliant and brutally honest." A CEO online said,

“He was a dear friend but never let friendship interfere with what he knew was good and right, holding our feet to the fire to meet his broad and high standards.”

Stuart was part of President Clinton’s transition team. In a meeting with the President elect he reluctantly raised his hand and let the Bill Clinton know that his health plan wasn’t actually “budget neutral.” At the end of the meeting Clinton put his arm around Stuart and told him, he was a good American. He was dropped from the transition team.

Never fear, months later Stuart was again in the President’s good graces. Clinton asked him to serve on the Commission on the Future of Medicare. Stuart ended up being the swing vote against the plan which would have privatized parts of the Medicare program. He wanted guarantees that funding would be adequate. He also said that his mother would never forgive him if the plan didn’t include prescription drug coverage. For taking a courageous stand, he was named health policy person of the year by Modern Health Care.

For decades, Stuart taught one of the largest undergraduate courses American Health Care, some of these in partnership with the recently passed Dr. Sam Their. He also taught a more advanced graduate version of this course and was a beloved star professor in the Executive MBA program for physicians.

Here is what some of his students had to say:

“ I’m devastated, he was THE best Professor in my Brandeis time; he taught policy with stories both personal and political-I learned so much from him and just adored him. So sad”

“I was so blessed to have had an opportunity to learn from him! The stories! The history! I absorbed it all, saved and savored it all! From Nixon to Romney to Duval Patrick, Clinton and Obama, he advised them all.”

“Stuart’s ability to simplify the most complicated systems and problems down to a single sentence on a slide, mixed in with narratives pulled from his remarkable career, is unrivaled.”

Above all his accomplishments Stuart was warm, kind, funny and generous with his time. He was a Mench.

A few weeks back, I called Stuart on the pretext of talking about the Patriots game. But I just wanted to check on him. I said, "Stuart, I just want you to know how important you are in my life. I am a better teacher, analyst and person because of you. Thank you. After a pause Stuart said, "it is a bit loud in here and I can't really hear you. We will talk soon." I think he did hear me, and I know I was speaking for a lot of people, who are better for knowing him.

The nation, the Commonwealth and Brandeis University are better because of him.

Brandeis and the country lost a legend, now it is up to all of us that he inspired to continue his legacy.