

September 8, 2008

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Mr. Speaker, it is my honor and privilege to rise in support of S. 2403, a bill to designate the new Federal Courthouse, located in the 700 block of East Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia, as the "Spottswood W. Robinson III and Robert R. Merhige, Jr. United States Courthouse."

The Commonwealth of Virginia has a rich history of contributions in the founding of this country and in the establishment and development of our legal system. Virginia practitioners such as George Wythe, Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, James Monroe, and Henry Clay have all profoundly shaped and molded our country's legal traditions. In fact, the first law school in the country was our own College of William and Mary located in Williamsburg, Virginia.

It is therefore fitting that we would name the new Federal Courthouse in our State's capital after two distinguished jurists, Judge Spottswood W. Robinson III and Judge Robert R. Merhige, Jr., whose exemplary careers under the law displayed the best ideals and principles of our Constitution and legal traditions.

Spottswood William Robinson III was born in Richmond, Virginia, on July 26, 1916, and passed away in his home in Virginia on October 11, 1998. He attended Virginia Union University and then Howard University Law School, graduating first in his class in 1939 and serving as a member of the faculty until 1947.

In 1964 Judge Robinson became the first African American to be appointed to the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. In 1966 President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Judge Robinson the first African American to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. On May 7, 1981, Judge Robinson became the first African American to serve as chief judge of the District of Columbia Circuit. Judge Robinson served on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and as dean of the Howard University Law School.

In addition to these exemplary and groundbreaking roles, Judge Robinson is probably best known for his role as one of the lead attorneys with the NAACP Legal Defense and Education

Fund from 1948 to 1960 and specifically for his representation of the Virginia plaintiffs in the 1954 landmark U.S. Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared "separate but equal" schools unconstitutional and is one of the landmark cases in our Nation's history.

Judge Robert R. Merhige was born in New York, New York on February 5, 1919, and passed away in Richmond on February 18, 2005. He attended High Point College in North Carolina where he received his undergraduate degree in 1940. He then earned his law degree from T.C. Williams School of Law at the University of Richmond from which he graduated at the top of his class in 1942.

From 1942 to 1945, during World War II, Judge Merhige served in the United States Army Air Force as a crewman on a B-17 bomber based in Italy. After the war he returned to Richmond where he practiced law from 1945 to 1967. During that time, Judge Merhige established himself as a formidable trial lawyer representing a wide variety of clients.

In August of 1967, Judge Merhige was appointed U.S. District Court judge for the Eastern District of Virginia, Richmond Division, by President Lyndon B. Johnson, where he served for 31 years. While on the Federal bench, Judge Merhige presided over some of the most important and complex litigation in United States history. He ordered the University of Virginia to admit women in 1970. In 1972 he ordered the desegregation of dozens of Virginia school districts. As a result of his decision, he and his family were victims of threats and violence, and he was given 24-hour protection by U.S. marshals. His judicial courage and independence in the face of strong opposition is a testament to his dedication to equal justice under the law, and I believe his example is as pertinent today as it was then.

The new Federal Courthouse in Richmond is under construction and nearing completion. I believe that naming it after these two exemplary jurists will not only serve as a tribute to their fierce adherence to the Constitution and to their legacy of equal justice under the law but also will serve as a reminder of their contributions to ensuring a fair and just legal system for all people.

Mr. Speaker, I commend Senator *John Warner* and Senator *Jim Webb* for introducing this bill in the Senate, as well as the support from the entire Virginia delegation. I would like to thank
Chairman *Oberstar* and
Chairwoman

Norton

, Ranking Members

Mica

and

Graves

, Representatives

Carney

and

King

, and both the Democratic and Republican leadership for the swift passage of this measure.