

November 18, 2010

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Madam Speaker, I rise today to mourn the loss of one of the Commonwealth of Virginia's finest public servants, a great man of faith and a trusted friend, former State Senator Dr. W. Henry Maxwell. This past Saturday, Dr. Maxwell passed away, and I would like to take a brief moment to celebrate his life and legacy.

A lifelong resident of Newport News, Dr. Maxwell was born on April 3, 1935, and graduated from Carver High School in 1951. Having been raised in the church, Dr. Maxwell nurtured a deep and abiding faith that eventually led him into the ministry. In 1967, he was ordained into gospel ministry and he formalized his calling, receiving both a bachelor of theology degree and a doctorate of divinity from Virginia Seminary and College.

It is hard to separate the life and legacy of Dr. Maxwell from the history of Ivy Baptist Church, the institution that Dr. Maxwell faithfully led for 37 years. Under his leadership, the church grew in size, purchased a new house of worship, and established a child care and learning center. As a fitting tribute to his years of dedicated service, Ivy Baptist erected the W. Henry Maxwell Family Life Center in 1999.

If Dr. Maxwell's only contribution to his community was as a pastor, he would have had a lasting legacy. But Dr. Maxwell was a civic activist and a public servant who was fond of saying: "If one was to be concerned about man, he should be concerned about the laws that govern man." Dr. Maxwell was an effective and hard-working legislator and a strong voice for the downtrodden. When I first became involved in community activities and politics in my hometown of Newport News, I was following in Dr. Maxwell's footsteps. Dr. Maxwell was serving as President of the Newport News branch of the NAACP when I came back to Newport News after finishing law school, and I was honored to step into his shoes in 1975 as President of the branch. Dr. Maxwell ran for Newport News City Council in 1976. Although his campaign was unsuccessful, the work of his campaign served as a foundation for my successful run for the Virginia House of Delegates in 1977. During my tenure in the Virginia House of Delegates, Dr. Maxwell was a trusted advisor and friend. When I was elected to the State Senate in 1983, Dr. Maxwell was elected to my House of Delegates seat. We served as colleagues in the Virginia General Assembly, until I was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992. Following my election, Dr. Maxwell was successfully elected to the State Senate.

Dr. Maxwell's tenure in the Virginia General Assembly as both a member of the House of Delegates and the State Senate, was characterized by a deep tie to the needs of his community. He was critical in obtaining state funds to restore the historic Newsome House and support its use as a community cultural center. He was an advocate for the continued operation of the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind. He was also instrumental in ensuring that judges in Virginia properly reflected the community they served. In addition to his formal duties as a member of the House of Delegates and a State Senator, Dr. Maxwell was engaged in many civic organizations. He was a Life Member of the NAACP, member of the board of trustees of the Peninsula Economic Development Council, the United Way of the Peninsula, and the Newport News Alliance for Youth.

Madam Speaker, the city of Newport News has lost a great public servant and I have lost a dear friend. I want to extend my deepest sympathies to Dr. Maxwell's wife of 53 years, Gladys, their children Walter, Ronald, and Angela, great-grandchildren, sisters Pauline, Sallie, Shirley and Gwendolyn, brothers Wesley and Thomas, nieces, nephews, other family and friends and the Ivy Baptist Church community.