

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, the U.S. House of Representatives considered S. 2403, a bill to designate the new U.S. Courthouse in Richmond, Virginia as the "Spottswood W. Robinson III and Robert R. Merhige, Jr. U.S. Courthouse."

S. 2403 was introduced by Virginia Senators John Warner and Jim Webb.

The bill passed the Senate on June 24, 2008 and is expected to pass the House at 6:30 p.m. today.

Below is Congressman Scott's full statement as prepared for delivery on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives:

"Madam 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 capitol city after two distinguished jurists – Judge Spottswood W. Robinson, III, and Judge Robert R. Merhige, Jr. – whose exemplary careers in 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 at his home in Virginia on October 11, 1998. He attended Virginia Union University and then Howard University School of Law, 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 Howard University Law School.

“In addition to these extraordinary and groundbreaking roles, Judge Robinson is probably best known for his role as one of the lead attorneys with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund from 1948 to 1960, and specifically for his representation of the Virginia plaintiffs in the 1954 landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *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 WWII – Judge Merhige served in the United States Army Air Forces 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 U.S. 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 that 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 law, but also serve as a reminder of their contributions to ensuring a fair and just legal system for all people.

“I commend Senator John Warner and Senator Jim Webb for introducing this bill in the Senate, as well as the members of the entire Virginia delegation for their support. I would also like to thank Chairman Oberstar and Chairwoman Norton, Ranking Members Mica and Graves, and both the Democrat and Republican Leadership for swift passage of this measure.”

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