

## SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 292

*Celebrating the life of John Andrew Watson, Jr.*

Agreed to by the Senate, March 9, 2006  
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, March 10, 2006

WHEREAS, John Andrew Watson, Jr., was born in Greenville, South Carolina, lived a rich and distinguished life, and full of years at age 85, entered into eternal rest on February 17, 2006; and

WHEREAS, at the age of two, his family left Greenville to settle in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where John Andrew Watson, Jr., was reared with his three brothers and two sisters; and

WHEREAS, John Andrew Watson, Jr., was educated in the Bethlehem Public Schools, and attended Howard University until he interrupted his studies to serve in the United States Army during World War II from 1943 to 1946, and was present when General George Patton's forces liberated Paris; and

WHEREAS, after the war, John Andrew Watson, Jr., returned to Howard University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in Romance Languages, and the desire for higher education compelled him to return to France, where he earned the Certificate of Graduate Studies, the equivalent of a master's degree, in Romance Languages from the University of Paris; and

WHEREAS, John Andrew Watson, Jr., joined the faculty at Virginia Union University in 1948 as an associate professor of Spanish and French, and, for 10 years, he concurrently taught Spanish at Virginia State University; and

WHEREAS, while teaching at Virginia Union University and Virginia State University, John Andrew Watson, Jr., earned a doctorate in Spanish at Catholic University; and

WHEREAS, with impeccable and impressive teaching credentials, John Andrew Watson, Jr., served as a member of the faculty at Howard University and as chairman of his department at Virginia State University for more than 30 years, and also held the position of professor and chairman of the Department of Foreign Languages at Virginia Union University, where he served for more than 57 years until his death; and

WHEREAS, John Andrew Watson, Jr., was noted for two speeches, and for 58 years he drilled the first speech into his students in the Department of Foreign Languages at Virginia Union University, in which he stated that "the mind learns how to learn when it learns a second language, and if you do not learn a foreign language before you leave college, you have left something behind"; and

WHEREAS, while at Virginia Union University, he discovered a new passion—tennis—which he taught himself to play well enough to become the University's tennis coach in 1959; and

WHEREAS, John Andrew Watson, Jr., coached tennis at Virginia Union University for 43 years, and from 1959 to 1987, his team never had a losing season; and

WHEREAS, John Andrew Watson, Jr., delivered his second speech for 46 years each June to tennis players packed into the bleachers at Battery Park before the opening of the Southeastern Open Tennis Tournament, which he had directed since its inception, lecturing and demanding "the highest level of sportsmanship, no bad language, no throwing down your racquet in disgust, and no temper tantrums"; and

WHEREAS, John Andrew Watson, Jr., demanded that his team and tennis students be sportsmen and more than just tennis players; he had the reputation of stopping grown men during matches and pulling players off the court for less than good sportsmanship conduct; and

WHEREAS, John Andrew Watson, Jr., equally well educated in the finer aspects of tennis, achieved a Virginia District #6 ranking, held rankings within the top three senior divisions of the American Tennis Association (ATA), and was a finalist in the senior division of the ATA Championships in Boston; and

WHEREAS, while playing tennis at the old Brook Field courts, the only place in Richmond at one time available to African American athletes, he met nine-year-old Arthur Robert Ashe, Jr., assumed the youth's tennis instruction from his previous coach, and helped the future champion to hone his early court skills; and

WHEREAS, John Andrew Watson, Jr., coached Arthur Ashe, was his constant practice partner until Arthur Ashe's departure from Richmond at age 15 to train with Dr. Walter Johnson (who also coached Althea Gibson), and is credited with turning Arthur Ashe into one of the world's greatest tennis players; and

WHEREAS, Richmond native Arthur Ashe won 51 titles during his tennis career, became the first African American player named to the United States Davis Cup team, the first African American to win the United States Open, and the first and only African American man to win Wimbledon; and earned respect and a reputation for impeccable sportsmanship, a quality he undoubtedly learned under the

tutelage of John Andrew Watson, Jr.; and

WHEREAS, John Andrew Watson, Jr., also made a name for himself in local tennis competitions; was among the first four African Americans to play in the Davenport City Tennis Championship when it moved to Byrd Park in 1967; served as the longtime president of the Richmond Racquet Club and first vice president of the American Tennis Association, the oldest African American sports organization in the United States; and was inducted into the Mid Atlantic Tennis Hall of Fame in 1992; and

WHEREAS, he was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and was actively involved in community service, volunteering for many years as a tennis coach for the Richmond Department of Recreation and Parks; and

WHEREAS, John Andrew Watson, Jr., believed that tennis was a sport for a lifetime, and through the game he touched the lives of many young people, saving many from a path of destruction by introducing them to tennis, a portal to a different life, and secured hundreds of scholarships for them during his tenure as director of the Southeastern Tennis Tournament; and

WHEREAS, he derived great personal satisfaction from knowing that so many children and youths of diverse backgrounds had benefited from his instruction and encouragement, and had developed into productive and successful citizens; and

WHEREAS, the lives of many have been enriched through the life of John Andrew Watson, Jr., and his family, friends, students, and colleagues and the people of Virginia mourn his loss, but will cherish his memory and legacy; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of John Andrew Watson, Jr.; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of John Andrew Watson, Jr., adopted son and distinguished educator and tennis coach, as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for his memory and gratitude for his service and contributions to the children and youth of this Commonwealth.