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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 489

Offered March 7, 2016

Commemorating the life and legacy of Gregory Hayes Swanson.

Patrons—McClellan, McQuinn and Toscano; Senator: Deeds

WHEREAS, in 1950, Gregory Hayes Swanson, a 26-year-old Danville native with a law practice in Martinsville, set a legal precedent by instituting a lawsuit against the Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia for admission to the School of Law and, by entering same on September 15, 1950, became the first African American to desegregate a formerly all-white university in Virginia, opening the door for the thousands of students who followed; and

WHEREAS, Gregory Swanson had previously been forced to go out of state to attend Howard University School of Law because the state of Virginia had no law schools that allowed African Americans to attend; and

WHEREAS, after obtaining a law degree from Howard University, Gregory Swanson worked in association with the esteemed Richmond civil rights law firm of Hill, Robinson and Martin, which was notable for at one time having more Civil Rights cases than any other in the South; and

WHEREAS, in an attempt to forestall desegregation of the University of Virginia (UVA) and other institutions of higher learning and after the highly-publicized application of Alice Jackson to attend UVA in 1935, the Virginia General Assembly passed the Dovell Act in 1936, which gave supplemental financial payments toward tuition to African American post-graduate scholars, to induce them to attend colleges and universities out of state; and

WHEREAS, Gregory Swanson, in the tradition of his Civil Rights mentors, refused such a "scholarship" to pursue a graduate degree outside of the Commonwealth; upon being denied admission to enter a master's degree program at the UVA School of Law by the Board of Visitors, and in furtherance of the Civil Rights strategy of breaking down legal barriers to higher education, Gregory Swanson filed suit and did bring such lawsuit to federal hearing in Charlottesville, on September 5, 1950; and

WHEREAS, Swanson v. Rector of Visitors was a nationally publicized landmark case, with Gregory Swanson represented by NAACP attorneys Thurgood Marshall, Oliver Hill, Spottswood Robinson, Martin A. Martin, and others, with Gregory Swanson and said legal team prevailing and furthering the cause of justice; and

WHEREAS, upon winning a unanimous decision of a three-judge panel, Gregory Swanson sacrificed his law practice to complete a year of study at UVA, while being forced to live off-campus at personal and family expense because of housing segregation laws, all the while enduring legal discrimination and social ostracism, with restrictions at football games, campus socials, etc.; and

WHEREAS, the Swanson case has been cited as bringing about the desegregation of other previously all-white institutions in Virginia, including The College of William & Mary; and

WHEREAS, Gregory Swanson died on July 26, 1992, after years of service as a member of the Virginia Bar and as an attorney with the Internal Revenue Service, without ever receiving any official recognition from the University of Virginia or from the Commonwealth of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Gregory Swanson's contribution to the Commonwealth was almost lost to history for 65 years, until the recent recognition by the Swanson Case Commemoration, held on October 25, 2015, at the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library Central Branch in Charlottesville, in the actual former federal courtroom where Gregory Swanson made history; the commemoration was sponsored by the Swanson Legacy Committee, comprising of Charlottesville community leaders and chaired by Gregory Swanson's nephew, Evans Hopkins, with the generous support of UVA and the UVA School of Law; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commemorate the life and legacy of Gregory Hayes Swanson, a Civil Rights pioneer and an inspiration to the citizens of the Commonwealth and the United States; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Gregory Hayes Swanson as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for his contributions to the Commonwealth and the Civil Rights Movement.

INTRODUCED

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