

2021 SPECIAL SESSION I

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 706

Celebrating the life of John F. Merchant.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 4, 2021
Agreed to by the Senate February 18, 2021

WHEREAS, John F. Merchant, the first African American graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law, died on March 5, 2020, at the age of 87; and

WHEREAS, John Merchant received a bachelor's degree from Virginia Union University, then enrolled at the University of Virginia School of Law and earned his Juris Doctor degree in 1958; he served his country as a member of the United States Navy; and

WHEREAS, John Merchant developed a passion for the game of golf, seeing it as a valuable means of networking, many opportunities for which had been denied to African Americans in the age of segregation; and

WHEREAS, John Merchant went on to become the first African American member of the United States Golf Association Executive Committee, serving from 1992 until 1998, and was inducted into the National Black Golf Hall of Fame in 2010; and

WHEREAS, John Merchant practiced both civil and criminal law in Connecticut for nearly 50 years and represented a young Tiger Woods during his transition from amateur status to becoming a professional golfer; and

WHEREAS, John Merchant advocated for more access to the game of golf for African American children, and he played a vital role in bringing together golf equipment manufacturers and others to create the nonprofit First Tee program, which has introduced the game and its character-building aspects to more than 15 million young people; and

WHEREAS, John Merchant established the Walter N. Ridley Scholarship Fund at the University of Virginia, named for the University's first African American graduate, to support and inspire new generations of students; and

WHEREAS, John Merchant is survived by his daughter, Susan Merchant, a University of Virginia School of Law graduate; his sister, Barbara; and six nieces and nephews; and

WHEREAS, John Merchant will be fondly remembered by his family members and friends and by the many people whose lives were touched through his commitment to service; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby note with great sadness the loss of John F. Merchant; 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 John F. Merchant as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for his memory.

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