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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 393

Offered March 1, 2016

Commending Grace Edmondson Harris.

Patron—McQuinn

WHEREAS, Grace Edmondson Harris, distinguished professor in the Center for Public Policy and former provost and vice president for academic affairs of Virginia Commonwealth University, was born in July 1933 and reared in Halifax County, one of six siblings in a family of preachers and teachers; and

WHEREAS, Grace Harris earned her bachelor's degree from Hampton Institute, now Hampton University, in 1954 and enrolled in graduate studies at Boston University, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was among her classmates; she attended Boston University during the time when Virginia and other southern states preferred to pay for African American graduate students to study out of state rather than to desegregate its institutions of higher education; and

WHEREAS, Grace Harris returned from Boston University to complete her master's degree in social work at Richmond Professional Institute, now a part of Virginia Commonwealth University, in 1960, and earn a master's degree and doctorate in sociology in 1974 and 1975, respectively, from the University of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Harris, one of the most highly regarded women in higher education, held many positions during her rising career at Virginia Commonwealth University, including dean and professor of the school of social work from 1982 - 1990; provost and vice president for academic affairs from 1993 - 1999, becoming the first African American woman to serve as the chief academic officer of a four-year public institution of higher education in Virginia; and acting president during the summer of 1995 and from April to June 1998; and

WHEREAS, when Dr. Harris retired in 1999 following a 32-year career at Virginia Commonwealth University, the Board of Visitors established the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute to honor her leadership, service, and contributions; and

WHEREAS, after her retirement from the university administration, Dr. Harris continued to serve as a distinguished professor at the Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Public Policy and as a prominent professor at the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute, where she mentored many alumni, students, and colleagues; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Harris has served on numerous boards to support issues in social welfare, health care, mental health services, and public education, and her past and present board service includes the Virginia Health Care Foundation, University of Richmond, United Way Services, and Christian Children's Fund; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Harris is the recipient of many awards and honors, including the Virginia Commonwealth University Presidential Medallion Award, the Presidential Award for Community Multicultural Enrichment, the Riese-Mellon Award, and honorary degrees from the University of Richmond, Virginia Union University, and The College of William and Mary; the former Virginia Commonwealth University School of Business building was rededicated as Grace E. Harris Hall in December 2007; she was cited for her leadership in establishing the first-ever long-range strategic plan for Virginia Commonwealth University; and she was honored for 50 years of dedicated service to Virginia Commonwealth University in 2010; and

WHEREAS, a visionary leader, a thoughtful listener, and a demure woman of superior intellect and impeccable character, Dr. Harris retired from the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute on December 25, 2015, concluding a long, prestigious, and noteworthy career as an extraordinary educator and administrator; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Grace Edmondson Harris for her extensive service and illustrious leadership in higher education; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Grace Edmondson Harris as an expression of the General Assembly's appreciation of her long and distinguished service to Virginia Commonwealth University and its best wishes for her well-deserved retirement.

INTRODUCED

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