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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 277

Offered January 15, 2025

Commending Lawrence Douglas Wilder.

Patrons—McDoogle, Bagby, Aird, Boysko, Carroll Foy, Cifers, Craig, Ebbin, Deeds, DeSteph, Diggs, Durant, Favola, French, Hackworth, Hashmi, Head, Jordan, Locke, Lucas, Marsden, McPike, Mulchi, Obenshain, Peake, Pekarsky, Perry, Pillion, Reeves, Roem, Rouse, Salim, Srinivasan, Stanley, Stuart, Sturtevant, Suetterlein, Surovell, VanValkenburg and Williams Graves; Delegates: Carr, Kent, McQuinn, Watts and Wyatt

WHEREAS, Lawrence Douglas Wilder, born in Richmond on January 17, 1931, has dedicated his life to public service, breaking numerous racial barriers and setting precedents in the Commonwealth and the United States; and

WHEREAS, Douglas Wilder earned a degree in chemistry from Virginia Union University in 1951, then served in the United States Army during the Korean War and was awarded the Bronze Star for heroism for capturing multiple enemy troops and providing assistance to his wounded fellow soldiers; after returning home, he obtained a law degree from Howard University in 1959; and

WHEREAS, in 1969, Douglas Wilder became the first African American elected to the Senate of Virginia since Reconstruction and subsequently built a reputation for pragmatism and bipartisan collaboration; and

WHEREAS, during his tenure as a state lawmaker, Douglas Wilder chaired the Steering Committee, responsible for assigning members to committees, and the Committees on Rehabilitation and Social Services, Transportation, and General Laws; he also served on the Committee for Courts of Justice and advocated for legislation to benefit low-income residents and juvenile justice reform; and

WHEREAS, in 1985, Douglas Wilder was elected lieutenant governor of Virginia, becoming the first African American to hold statewide office in the Commonwealth, exemplifying his perseverance and dedication to public service; and

WHEREAS, in 1989, Douglas Wilder made history as the first African American elected as a state governor in the United States; he served as governor of Virginia from 1990 to 1994, during which time his administration was praised for sound fiscal management, including the creation of the "Rainy Day Fund" to stabilize the Commonwealth's finances during economic downturns, and sponsoring new construction projects for educational and mental health institutions; and

WHEREAS, as governor, Douglas Wilder signed legislation making Virginia one of the first states to recognize Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a statewide holiday, exemplifying his commitment to civil rights and equality; and

WHEREAS, after his gubernatorial term, Douglas Wilder continued his public service as the first directly elected mayor of Richmond from 2005 to 2009, during which time he improved public safety by spearheading crime reduction initiatives and enhancing emergency services, while also advancing governance and development efforts across the city; and

WHEREAS, Douglas Wilder's legacy continues through his role as a distinguished professor at the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University, where he has been instrumental in promoting public discourse through the Wilder Symposium, which highlights critical issues such as the lack of funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, leading to an official opinion on the matter by the attorney general of Virginia, and contributing to the Commonwealth Poll, which provides critical insights into the perspectives of Virginians on key public policy issues; and

WHEREAS, Douglas Wilder's groundbreaking achievements have not only reshaped Virginia's political landscape but have also opened doors for future generations of diverse leaders across the Commonwealth and the nation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend Lawrence Douglas Wilder for his exceptional service, groundbreaking achievements, and enduring impact on the Commonwealth and the nation on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of his historic election as lieutenant governor of Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Lawrence Douglas Wilder as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for his legacy of exceptional service to the Commonwealth.

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