We are gathered tonight to recognize and applaud two distinguished Virginians for their lives of public service.

Linwood Holton and Douglas Wilder are from different parties, different parts of Virginia and different backgrounds, and their terms as governor are separated by decades, but their stories are bound by a thread that traces the progress of justice, equality and opportunity in our Commonwealth.

Let me try to follow that thread, to draw that connection through history.

In 1969, when Linwood Holton became the first Republican elected governor of Virginia in 100 years, the country was in turmoil over civil rights. Even 15 years after Brown v. Board of Education and 5 years after President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, many schools were de facto segregated and social change still faced persistent opposition. Governor Holton had opposed Massive Resistance – the state's pernicious anti-desegregation strategy – from the moment that he entered politics. He and others built up the then Virginia Republican Party as a modern, moderate alternative to the then segregationist Southern Democrats in power for generations. When he was elected, it was a triumph of change, and he famously declared in his Inaugural Address: "The era of defiance is behind us."

With more than words, Governor Holton demonstrated his commitment when he walked his daughter Tayloe into the nearly all-black high school in Richmond where she was enrolled. It had not been long since another Southern governor bitterly stood in the schoolhouse door to block desegregation. The photograph of Governor Holton and his daughter made the front pages of the New York Times, and signaled the emergence of a new Virginia.

To some of you, these stories are the stuff of history – but they are the lived experiences of many Virginians; How can I fail to note that one of the Holton children enrolled in those schools in the 1970s – Anne – was later Virginia's first lady and has just been appointed by our new governor to be Secretary of Education?
In many respects, the steps that Governor Holton took to that Richmond high school were along a path that, 20 years later, opened on to the bright January day on which Doug Wilder was sworn in – the first African-American elected governor of any state in U.S. history. That photo made the front page of the Times, too. The writer said the event "changed the political face of the United States."

Doug Wilder had already made history four years earlier, when he became the first African-American ever elected to statewide office in Virginia, as lieutenant-governor on a Democratic ticket that – with Mary Sue Terry and me – became the most diverse of any statewide political ticket before or since.

Unity, not division, was the Wilder theme on his Inauguration Day in 1990. I can still hear the cheers that rolled across the Capitol grounds, as Douglas Wilder, the grandson of slaves, proclaimed, "I am a son of Virginia."

As Virginians are wont to do, Governor Wilder traced the thread that connected his inauguration to the Founders. I'm abbreviating here, but he said, "We mark today not a victory of party or the accomplishments of an individual, but the triumph of an idea ... expressed so eloquently from this great Commonwealth by those who gave shape to the greatest nation ever known ... The idea that all men are created equally; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Reaching from that idea of 1776 to today, surely Governor Wilder's historic success in Virginia marked a milestone on the path that Barack Obama traveled almost 20 years later to the highest office in the nation.

We honor Governor Holton and Governor Wilder tonight in particular, for their contributions relate to our progress since *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act. But there's more to their stories.

Linwood Holton was born in Big Stone Gap in 1923. He graduated from Washington and Lee, served in the submarine force during World War II, and then earned a law degree at Harvard. Entering politics in the 1950s, he was part of the moderate Mountain-Valley Republican movement. In 1969, he assembled an uncommon coalition of Republicans, African-Americans and labor, and became the first Republican governor of Virginia since Reconstruction.

That watershed not only spelled the end to Massive Resistance, but established a competitive, two-party system in Virginia. Over time, as we know, issues change, party labels change, even the definitions of conservative, moderate and liberal change – but Governor Holton's enduring political legacy is that a moderate-conservative appeal to independents, rather than social or ideological issues, is a formula for success in statewide elections – and for progress and accomplishment in office.

As chief executive, Governor Holton championed reforms that reduced pollution in Virginia waters, launched our ports toward becoming the vital asset that they are today, and modernized state government.
Before 1970, 200 agencies and institutions of government reported to the Governor, making it difficult for any Governor to oversee and direct agency operations. Governor Holton proposed modernizing Virginia's government with a cabinet secretarial structure, a sound proposal, but controversial enough at the time that the Virginia Senate killed it in debate by one vote, with then Senator Wilder voting with those against it. But, in a parliamentary maneuver, Senator Wilder moved to reconsider the vote by which the bill was defeated, then changed his vote to support the proposal, thereby helping Governor Holton to bring a more modern government structure into being by one vote.

When his term ended, Governor Holton did not leave public service. He served in the State Department, led the process by which Dulles and National airports were transferred from federal control to today's regional authority, and lent his influence and ability to encourage high-tech development in Virginia as president of the Center for Innovative Technology.

Lawrence Douglas Wilder was born in Richmond in 1931, the seventh of eight children in a family whose life he later described as one of "gentle poverty." His father, whose parents had been slaves in Goochland County, sold insurance. The story goes that his mother made him learn a new word every day from a crossword puzzle. As an orator later, he was famous for flourishing 50-dollar words, along with erudite references from literature and philosophy.

He earned a chemistry degree from Virginia Union, working his way through college waiting tables at hotels and clubs where he was otherwise unwelcome because of his race (and where he would later be celebrated as Virginia's chief executive). In the Korean War, he earned a Bronze Star for bravery in combat, but returned to Virginia to find Jim Crow still in command. Inspired to pursue law after the Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision, he found Virginia law schools all still segregated. So he took a law degree at Howard University, and returned to Richmond to open his practice.

His political career began in 1969, when he became the first African-American elected to the Virginia Senate in the 20th century. (Yes, that was the same election year that made Linwood Holton governor.) After accumulating experience and respect over five terms, he sought the lieutenant-governorship in 1985. Face-to-face, town-to-town, tireless grassroots campaigning won the election.

Four years later, Governor Wilder's election was hailed as another breakthrough for equality and opportunity, especially in a state of the Confederacy. To give you a sense of the political drama of that moment, Governor Wilder won more votes than any previous gubernatorial candidate in Virginia history — but his victory was by what remains the closest margin of any governor.

The Wilder administration faced a recession of very austere proportions, and he took a disciplined approach. That sometimes made him unpopular with legislators, college presidents and others whose budgets felt the pressure, but Virginia was named the nation's best managed state. Governor Wilder achieved other goals as well, including a one-gun-a-month purchase limit to fight gun-running. He also won Virginia a better allocation of federal transportation funds — a battle that never ends.
Governor Wilder, too, has remained active in public affairs. Ten years after leaving the Executive Mansion, he was elected and served as mayor of Richmond. Today he lectures at Virginia Commonwealth University – in the school of public policy that bears his name.

But let me return to that sunny, cold day on Capitol Square when Douglas Wilder was inaugurated, because it ties us back to the reason we are here tonight to honor these two leaders’ distinguished public service.

In his Inaugural Address, my learned friend characteristically quoted the Roman Cicero, who wrote: "A Commonwealth is not any collection of human beings ... but an assembly of people joined in agreement on justice and partnership for the common good, and a community where civility must reign and all must live peacefully together."

Governor Holton sounded a similar theme in his Inaugural, saying, "We must see that no citizen of the Commonwealth is excluded from full participation in both the blessings and responsibilities of our society. ... We will have a government based on partnership of all Virginians."

The gentlemen we honor tonight stand out in the long path toward those ideals. But none of us – and certainly not Governor Holton or Governor Wilder – would argue that we've achieved, as a state or as a nation, that perfect society in which all people are treated fairly and equally, and the dignity of all is respected. Many obstacles remain, but it's well to pause tonight and reflect on the linked histories of Linwood Holton and Douglas Wilder, whose commitment and contributions should be an inspiration to all who labor on that path.

And so it is my pleasure to present to these two friends and colleagues of longstanding, The Virginia Bar Association’s highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award.

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