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WILLIAM B. SPONG, JR.
*A Tribute from the
Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia*

The success of Senator Spong is a victory for the force of reason in American life. [His] . . . experience in the Senate demonstrates that rational analysis may still thrive in our government, despite the pressure of throttling emotionalism. To all for whom the law is important . . . Senator Spong offers hope that the bond of law to reason may yet endure.

John P. Frank¹

I was a law student at the University of Virginia when I first read the article from which those words are taken. The author described a man whose principled conduct and thoughtful style seemed to me just what our country needed. Soon thereafter, I got to know Bill Spong quite well and my view of him has not changed. He is a remarkably gifted man, and he is certainly one of the most distinguished Virginians of his generation. I am pleased to add my own words of praise to the well-deserved tribute above upon his retirement as Dean of Marshall-Wythe School of Law.

Mr. Frank knew his man when he spoke of Senator Spong's commitment to reason. Bill is an independent and incisive thinker. These qualities were demonstrated vividly during the United States Senate's consideration of President Nixon's nominations of Clement Haynsworth and then Harrold Carswell to the United States Supreme Court. Bill voted to confirm Judge Haynsworth's nomination and against Judge Carswell. Subsequent developments proved him to have been absolutely right. At the same time, however, his vote for Judge Haynsworth was condemned by many black leaders both at the national and state levels, while his vote against Judge Carswell caused many to call him a traitor to the South. Bill Spong was not only right. His study of the records of the two nominees was characteristically painstaking. He spent hours reading the written opinions of both nominees and consulted personally and at great length with a range of legal experts. His decision was made strictly on the merits after careful thought. He

1. Frank, *Ruminations on Reason and Law: A Spong Song*, 50 TEX. L. REV. 35, 58 (1971).

was unmoved by the fact that his vote for Judge Haynsworth and against Judge Carswell had alienated voters at both ends of the political spectrum and could end his senatorial career.

The other constant in Bill Spong's public life has been an abiding love of Virginia. Whatever the office he has held, whatever the issue under consideration, he has sought to call Virginians to greatness. His work as Chairman of the Spong Commission on Education when he was a member of the Virginia Senate had a stunning impact on the quality of public education. His service at my invitation as Chairman of the Governor's Commission on Virginia's Future will, I predict, have an equally significant impact on the long-term life of the Commonwealth. The reports of both "Spong Commissions" share common virtues: they are candid, insightful, courageous and eloquent.

Mr. Frank's article about Bill Spong's success in the Senate was written in 1971. In 1972, Bill lost his reelection bid. That result cost Virginia and the nation a public servant of exceptional ability. Yet Bill Spong would not allow a political loss to become a personal defeat. That, too, is an important mark of his character.

Virginia may have lost an able United States Senator, but it found a distinguished and highly successful law school dean. Bill has led the Law School at William and Mary from the shadow of disaccreditation to the brink of national distinction. I suspect he has found as much if not more satisfaction in this achievement than in any conceivable political success he might have had.

The citizens of Virginia have been the ultimate beneficiary of Bill Spong's long and constructive public life. As Governor and as his friend, I am privileged to acknowledge our common indebtedness to this great Virginian.

Charles S. Robb
July 1985