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Judge Raymond L. Finch Remembered As a 'Bastion of Integrity, Ethical and Moral Excellence' Following his Passing

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Judge Raymond L. Finch.

The death of Judge Raymond L. Finch this week has prompted several officials of the U.S.V.I. to issue public statements of condolences and sympathy.

Raymond Lawrence Finch was born on October 1940 in Christiansted St. Croix to Wilfred and Beryl Finch. His early education was at Christiansted High School, followed by a bachelor's degree in political science from Howard University in 1962, and a bachelor's in law three years later from Howard University's law school.

Judge Finch served a stint in the armed forces in Vietnam, serving in the U.S. Army from 1966-1969 as a judge advocate, earning a Bronze Star Medal and rising to the rank of Army Captain. Upon his return to the Virgin Islands in 1970, he joined a private law firm, becoming a partner in Hodge, Sheen, Finch & Ross by the next year. In 1976, he was appointed to the bench of the Virgin Islands Municipal Court, where he served as a judge until 1994. In that year, he was nominated and confirmed as a judge on the United States District Court of the Virgin Islands. In 1999 he was elevated to Chief Judge. Judge Finch was re-appointed to his post in 2004, and took on senior status four years later.

On Thursday night, the office of Senate President Novelle Francis issued a statement in which Senator Francis said that he was "fortunate" to have worked with the late Judge. "His courtroom was a master class in civics and the law," said Mr. Francis. "I remember when he sent the District Court marshals to collect people who had not reported for jury duty. While it was amusing at the time, it also showed his firm commitment to ensure that every person in his court would have the same access to a jury of their peers."

Senator Francis offered sympathies on behalf of the 35th Legislature to Judge Finch's widow Anne-Marie and his family, friends and colleagues.

On Friday morning, it was the turn of Senator-at-Large Angel Bolques Jr. to issue a statement of his own. Senator Bolques called Judge Finch "a bastion of integrity, ethical and moral excellence," saying that he was a "preeminent" voice in the territory's judicial system, as well as "a proud Crucian, and a decorated veteran of the Vietnam War. ... We must continue to appreciate and emulate the standard he set as one of our own."

Senate Majority Leader Kenneth Gittens, said, "I am saddened that our Territory and St. Croix have lost such an icon," Senator Gittens said. I was privileged to have known him both on a personal and professional level.

"I am so grateful we were able to honor him while he could smell his roses. Judge Finch was a true and dedicated son of the soil, born and raised on St. Croix. In his decades as an attorney and a judge, he has sat at both the table and on the bench, carrying out his duties with professionalism. He was stern, but still soft-spoken, even in his most passionate moments. His courtroom was always a classroom for law and civics with dozens of teachable moments. He was candid, poised, fair, and a true pillar of this community.

A statement from the Office of Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett expressed the sympathies of the Congresswoman and her staff.

"I was tremendously saddened to hear of the passing of Judge Raymond L. Finch. Judge Finch was an excellent jurist, dedicated to the rule of law. He served over 23 years in judgeship and was eventually appointed to the District Court by President Bill Clinton, then reappointed by President George W. Bush to serve as chief judge of the court for several years. Judge Finch also served honorably in the U.S. Army, gaining the rank of captain in the Vietnam War as well as being awarded the Bronze Star Medal, the Army Commendation Medal," Ms. Plaskett said.

"Although we mourn his passing, I am grateful for the tremendous example set by Judge Finch. He was a true public servant, dedicated to the good of our home, as evidenced by his service on numerous professional and community associations, including the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, and as a member of the boards of the Boys and Girls Club and Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands.

“I send my prayers for comfort and peace to his to his wife, Anne-Marie Finch, his children, Allison, Mark, and Jennifer, stepchildren, Marc and Michelle, and his loved ones and friends.”

Governor Albert Bryan on Friday evening expressed condolences, noting that Judge Finch served the territory fairly. “It is with great sadness that I learned of the passing of one of the Virgin Islands most noted jurists, District Judge Raymond Finch, who served the people of the Territory fairly and prudently for decades, first in the Territorial Court and then for more than 15 years as a federal judge in the U.S. District Court after being nominated to consecutive terms by President George W. Bush and President Bill Clinton.

“A native Crucian, Judge Finch served for six years as the Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court and set an eminent example as an honorable and impartial arbiter of the law. His service for the betterment of our community and its people will not be forgotten.

“On behalf of First Lady Yolanda Bryan, my family, and the people of the Virgin Islands, I express my sincere condolences to his family, friends and loved ones during their time of bereavement," the governor said.

Funeral announcements for the late Judge Raymond L. Finch have not yet been announced.