

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 1

Memorializing 'The Doomed Youth' of 1914.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 10, 2014

WHEREAS, a century ago the European peoples, their American kin included, basked in a newfound material and scientific prosperity that they believed to have both banished strife and opened upon a future of unlimited "Progress"; and

WHEREAS, the "Guns of August" that year portended the mobilization of whole continents into what would become the First World War; and

WHEREAS, the first flush of enthusiasm by which whole peoples flocked to take up arms against one another was soon submerged in the trenches and also the once unimaginable carnage of the Western Front; and

WHEREAS, the following four years of worldwide conflagration would result in 37 million casualties, including 10 million soldiers—the vast majority of them unsuspecting civilians thrust from home and hamlet into experiences once reserved for professional men-at-arms; and

WHEREAS, the casualties of the conflict would include seven million civilians and a further six million missing and presumed dead among both military and civilian populations; and

WHEREAS, both the several Christian monarchies of West and East, though bound by blood and faith, and also the vaunted secular democracies that subscribed to "the brotherhood of man," proved incapable of preventing the wholesale slaughter that ensued; and

WHEREAS, even the United States of America were at last unable to resist the temptation to submit to the sirens of War; and

WHEREAS, entire empires—including the Hapsburg, the German, the Russian, and the Ottoman—were swept away by the unforeseen breadth and vehemence of the conflict; and

WHEREAS, the eminent American man of letters Henry James was moved to observe that, "The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness . . . is too tragic for any words"; and

WHEREAS, "Never [would there be]," in the words of poet Philip Larkin, "such innocence again"; and

WHEREAS, Wilfred Owen, one of the many poets who would be killed in combat, observed of the events of a century ago:

1914

War broke: and now the Winter of the world
With perishing great darkness closes in.
The foul tornado . . .
Is over all the width of Europe whirled,
Rending the sails of progress. Rent or furled
Are all Art's ensigns. Verse wails. Now begin
Famines of thought and feeling. Love's wine's thin.
The grain of human Autumn rots, down-hurled.
For after Spring had bloomed in early Greece,
And Summer blazed her glory out with Rome,
An Autumn softly fell, a harvest home,
A slow grand age, and rich with all increase.
But now, for us, wild Winter, and the need
Of sowings, for new Spring, and blood for seed; and

WHEREAS, though the "The Great War" would end, it was to be followed by retributions and "a period of exhaustion that," Winston Churchill would aver, "we insisted on calling 'Peace'—leading inexorably to the sequel of 1939 - 1945 and to 'Cold War' and to the perils that haunt still the peace of peoples"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the members of the body solemnly reflect on the meaning of a century of warfare on so colossal a scale that it came as a shock even to the architects of military might and maneuver; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the custodians of soldierly remembrance in the American Legion.