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## HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 266

Offered January 11, 2017

Prefiled November 29, 2016

*Commending James Bowman.*

Patron—Ware

WHEREAS, it is from Homer and the ancient culture and legacy of Greece that there descends to the peoples of the West a distinctive experience, understanding, and code of honor, both individual and communal; and

WHEREAS, a half-millennium after Homer in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* explored the epic quest of fame, glory, and honor, still Plato could affirm that "What is honored in the country is cultivated there"; and

WHEREAS, James Bowman, in *Honor: A History*, demonstrates that ". . . in essence both fame and the expectation that men would desire it . . . remained unchanged from the days of Achilles to those of General Eisenhower"; and

WHEREAS, fame in its classic sense, Mr. Bowman explains, has to do with honor as "the good opinion of the people who matter to us"; and

WHEREAS, the understanding of honor that characterized Graeco-Roman culture and therefore informed the customs of the European peoples for nearly three millennia holds that "honor is out of individual control, subordinates the individual to his society, requires us to judge and has no regard for the feelings of those it crushes but also . . . is contextual, not absolute, and varies from society to society," and therefore the tradition of honor is at times at odds both with the regnant individualism of the modern era and certain tenets of Christendom; and

WHEREAS, James Bowman asserts that "the summit of Western civilization's achievement [in attaining a *modus vivendi* between the demands of honor and those of religion] . . . was the Anglo-Saxon ideal of the gentleman"; and

WHEREAS, James Bowman further affirms that "For 300 years, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, the dynamic interaction of the different strands of Western culture went to produce as its highest human type not the brave and mighty warriors of antiquity . . . but someone who was blessed with certain civilized virtues. The Renaissance made him a scholar and a linguist, as well as a warrior; the 18th century made him (like the American Founding Fathers) a patriot and a philosopher as well. The 19th century added sportsmanship and a kind of rugged piety . . ."; and

WHEREAS, "All this progress towards a distinctively Western idea of honor came to an end with the First World War . . . in the trenches" in a mechanized warfare that was widely believed to have shown that "individual acts of bravery and heroism on which honor depends had been rendered meaningless"; and

WHEREAS, a century after the First World War, "hardly anyone even knows what honor means, or what it once meant"; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Bowman suggests, "into the moral vacuum created by the disappearance of the idea of honor from our public life has rushed a horrible mutant substitute that goes under the name of . . . 'celebrity'"; and

WHEREAS, the loss of the individual sense and the cultural codes of honor imperils both domestic society and a country's ability to sustain the military morale without which the very safety of a nation is at risk; Mr. Bowman warns that "it may take a war with a primitive honor culture to bring our own sense of honor back"; and

WHEREAS, James Bowman concludes his monumental study with the observation that "[A]mong nations honor remains as indispensable as ever. It is our failure to understand this which has created so many of the foreign policy disasters of the last half-century and more"; and

WHEREAS, true to their heritage despite the vicissitudes of change, Virginians of every kind in every generation have upheld the demands of personal, social, and political honor; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That James Bowman hereby be commended for the scholarly achievements manifest in his timely work *Honor: A History*; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to James Bowman at a forum on his magnum opus, *Honor: A History*, to be convened in Richmond.