

2022 SPECIAL SESSION I

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HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 604

Commemorating the life and legacy of Whittaker Chambers.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, June 1, 2022

WHEREAS, in every traditional culture there has arisen, from time to time, a man or woman gifted with prophetic vision; and

WHEREAS, it is prophecy, not necessarily to see into the future, but to recognize within the present era of history the contending, transcendent principles of truth and falsehood and reality and fantasy; and

WHEREAS, to bear witness to the intuition of prophecy invariably incurs for the prophet the praise of some and the opposition of many; and

WHEREAS, in recent history, such a prophet was Whittaker Chambers (1901-1961), a man of titanic intelligence and courage, who identified the underlying forces that twice led to a world at war and accounted for the complexity of the long Cold War that ensued; and

WHEREAS, it was Whittaker Chambers who provided the witness—affirmed by many, doubted still by some—to the origins and extent to which Marxist materialism as practiced by the Soviet Union had suborned individuals in the highest echelons of the United States government, United States State Department official Alger Hiss preeminent among them; and

WHEREAS, it was Whittaker Chambers who strove further to assert that the attractiveness of Communist ideology to many intellectuals of his time was rooted in the coarseness of American culture and the insecurity, alike for individuals and the whole of American society, of unbridled capitalism, for he noted, "The West believes its destiny is prosperity and an abundance of goods. So does the [Soviet] Politburo"; and

WHEREAS, Whittaker Chambers spoke and wrote from hard experience, having himself joined the Communist Party in 1925, shortly after leaving Columbia University, wherein, he later wrote, he encountered no professor who could explain to him the qualities necessary to renew and sustain Western culture and civilization; and

WHEREAS, Whittaker Chambers wrote for Communist journals in the United States and, for several years, was part of an "underground" network of agents—spies—for the Soviet Union; and

WHEREAS, having become disillusioned with Communism and with much of life itself, Whittaker Chambers broke from the Communist Party in 1938 and took his family into hiding, emerging to join the staff of *Time* magazine in 1939 as war loomed in Europe; and

WHEREAS, though *Witness*—a book about Whittaker Chambers' life as a Communist and his testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1948—remains his masterpiece, Whittaker Chambers strove in other works, principally the posthumously published *Cold Friday*, to bear the witness that the materialistic idealism that took root in the Russian Revolution and the Marxist-Leninism of the Soviet Union originated in the West, not the East; and

WHEREAS, Whittaker Chambers in *Cold Friday* observes that, ". . . my century . . . is unique in history for two reasons. It is the first century since life began when a decisive part of the most articulate section of mankind has not merely ceased to believe in God but has deliberately rejected God. And it is the century in which this religious rejection has taken a specifically political form," namely, the form of "revolution"; and

WHEREAS, Whittaker Chambers wrote that, though Soviet Communism threatened the West, the Marxist-Leninist revolution was actually a phase of "a greater revolution, whose ideas and intellectual force and physical force . . . derive their force from the modern Western mind. It is that mind which it is everywhere substituting for the mind of the earlier Christian world"; and

WHEREAS, to Whittaker Chambers, "the enlightened, articulate elite [of the West] has rejected the religious roots of the civilization—the roots without it is no longer Western civilization, but a new order of beliefs, attitudes, and mandates [and] this is the order of which Communism is one logical expression, originating not in Russia but in the capitals of the West, reaching Russia by clandestine delivery via the old underground centers in Cracow, Vienna, Berne, Zurich, and Geneva"; and

WHEREAS, "It is," Whittaker Chambers elaborated, "a Western body of belief that now threatens the West . . . As a body of Western beliefs, secular and rationalistic, the intelligentsia of the West share it [so that] the enemy—he is ourselves. That is why it is idle to talk about preventing the wreck of Western civilization. It is already a wreck from within"; and

WHEREAS, Whittaker Chambers consequently concluded, "That is why we can hope to do little more now than snatch a fingernail of a saint from the rack or a handful of ashes from the [embers], and bury them secretly in a flowerpot against the day, ages hence, when a few men begin again to dare to believe that there was once something else, that something else is thinkable, and need some evidence of

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what it was, the fortifying knowledge that there were those who, at the great nightfall, took loving thought to preserve the tokens of hope and truth"; and

WHEREAS, the Honorable David E. Johnson, already the biographer of distinguished Virginians Douglas Southall Freeman, John Randolph of Roanoke, and Spencer Roane, is undertaking to compose a comprehensive intellectual biography of Whittaker Chambers; and

WHEREAS, David E. Johnson has recently presented a précis of his manuscript to a forum in Richmond entitled "An Evening on Whittaker Chambers"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the life and legacy of Whittaker Chambers, the brave and eloquent witness to the permanent things lived and written, hereby be commemorated; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Honorable David E. Johnson in gratitude for directing his scholarly labors toward a work conveying the witness of Whittaker Chambers to new generations of readers.