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## HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 211

Offered January 9, 2019

Prefiled December 6, 2018

*Commemorating the life and legacy of Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn.*

Patron—Ware

WHEREAS, it was in the same year and within the span of a few weeks a century ago that the Great War ended, Russia descended into revolution, and Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn, destined to become one of the world's greatest writers, was born on December 11, 1918; and

WHEREAS, having before he was born lost his father to a hunting accident—hence his early baptism into the experience of violence—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was raised by his mother and aunt and witnessed the transformation of his family's farming estate into a communistic collective of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1930; and

WHEREAS, his academic studies interrupted by the cataclysm of the Second World War, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn served as captain of an artillery sound-testing and targeting battery in East Prussia, and there witnessed—and on at least one occasion participated in—the atrocities against civilians that became a ghastly characteristic of the conflict everywhere in the world; and

WHEREAS, despite having been decorated for heroism in combat, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was convicted of crimes against the state for expressing—in private correspondence—views mildly critical of Soviet leader Josef Stalin and was confined to Lubyanka Prison, wherein, in mid-1945, he could hear crowds outside celebrating the end of the war in Europe; and

WHEREAS, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn would serve eight years in a labor camp—a Gulag—with millions of other Soviet citizens and a further two years of internal exile; and

WHEREAS, restored to his family, and employed as a teacher, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, as a consequence of his years of reflection, of punishment, and of exile, abandoned the Marxist ideology of the Soviet state and devoted himself to exploring the historical and spiritual origins and meaning of the calamities that had befallen not only himself and his family but his entire country, indeed, the entire world; and

WHEREAS, in one of those paradoxes that suggest that the miraculous remains possible within the most unjust of circumstances, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn experienced an intellectual (and spiritual) conversion in a harsh confinement that Soviet authorities intended to demoralize him, later writing, "Bless you prison, bless you for being in my life. For there, lying upon the rotting prison straw, I came to realize that the object of life is not prosperity as we are made to believe, but the maturity of the human soul"; and

WHEREAS, freed from exile and exonerated in 1956, three years after the death of Josef Stalin, Solzhenitsyn resumed—and vastly expanded upon—the writing he had secretly begun in the Gulag; and

WHEREAS, in 1962, with the permission of Soviet authorities, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's first published work, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, a short novel depicting, openly for the first time in Soviet history, something of the horrific story of the regime's vast network of penal camps appeared in the journal *Novy Mir*; and

WHEREAS, the modest light Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn had cast upon the Soviet system of terror was soon extinguished, and the succeeding years saw him subjected to harassment by the secret police, his papers seized, and his access to a public readership in his homeland closed; and

WHEREAS, despite Soviet threats, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn continued, secretly, to write, including what would become his three-volume masterwork, *The Gulag Archipelago*, with some of his friends hiding his manuscripts from spies and others smuggling manuscripts to the West, where his next major novels were published; and

WHEREAS, despite having been denied a readership of his works, including *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle*, in his homeland, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was in 1970 awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature; and

WHEREAS, in 1971, owing solely to his renown, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was nearly assassinated through poisoning by the Soviet secret police; and

WHEREAS, in 1974, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Soviet Union, accepted asylum in the United States, and settled at last at a remote chalet in rural Vermont; and

WHEREAS, in 1978, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn delivered a momentous address for Harvard University, challenging the institution's graduating seniors to confront what he deemed the evidence of "decline" in Western Civilization from a former "triumphal march to its present debility"; and

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59 WHEREAS, a kernel of the legacy of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is to be found in his observation that  
60 "the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political  
61 parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts"; and

62 WHEREAS, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was able to return to his homeland in 1994, three years after the  
63 collapse of the Soviet Union, whose prison system he survived and in his literary works disclosed to the  
64 entire world, and he died in his beloved Russia in 2008; and

65 WHEREAS, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, out of the depths of his suffering and the luminosity of his  
66 penetration into the stark realities of Soviet communism, deployed what an important scholar has  
67 described as "the creative power" of his mind, heart, and spirit "to the task of re-establishing objective  
68 truth in a country whose government had devoted so much murderous energy to proving that there can  
69 be no such thing"; and

70 WHEREAS, Lee Congdon, Professor Emeritus of History at James Madison University, is the author  
71 of a major new scholarly work entitled *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: The Historical-Spiritual Destinies of*  
72 *Russia and the West*; and

73 WHEREAS, Professor Lee Congdon will be principal speaker at an upcoming forum on Aleksandr  
74 Solzhenitsyn's life and works, which will be held in Richmond; now, therefore, be it

75 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the life and legacy of Aleksandr Isayevich  
76 Solzhenitsyn hereby be commemorated on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth; and, be it

77 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution  
78 for presentation to Professor Lee Congdon, a Virginian whose contributions to scholarship on the literary  
79 and spiritual legacy of Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn are receiving national and even international  
80 attention.