

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 77

Commemorating the life and legacy of Oswald Spengler.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 17, 2020

WHEREAS, a century ago, Virginians and serious readers 'round the world were engrossed in *Decline of the West*, by Oswald Spengler (1880-1936); and

WHEREAS, *Decline of the West* appeared in German in 1918—just as the First World War was coming to its tragic close—and was completed in a second volume published in 1922; and

WHEREAS, on the eve of the Second World War, *Time* magazine would observe, "Cultivated discourse [in the 1920s had become] Spengler-saturated...It was imperative to read Spengler, to sympathize or revolt. It still remains so"; and

WHEREAS, Oswald Spengler in *Decline of the West* dismisses the linear view of history as one of inexorable progress from ancient, through medieval, and modern periods, and instead declares that only cultures account for the vitality of human history and that only eight major cultures have been manifested in all of human history; and

WHEREAS, cultures, as organic energies, are creative in all aspects of human endeavor, pass through a cycle similar to the seasons, and, with the onset of its "Winter," a culture in its final civilizational phase descends into merely a complex organization that exhausts the rich creations it had inherited from the originating culture; and

WHEREAS, Oswald Spengler in *Decline of the West* asserted that, "At last, in the gray dawn of Civilization the fire in the Soul dies down. The dwindling powers rise to one more, half-successful, effort of creation, and produce the Classicism that is common to all dying Cultures. The soul thinks once again, and in Romanticism looks back piteously to its childhood; then finally, weary, reluctant, cold, it loses its desire to be, and, as in Imperial Rome, wishes itself out of the overlong daylight and back in the darkness of proto-mysticism in the womb of the mother in the grave"; and

WHEREAS, Oswald Spengler continued, "One day the last portrait of Rembrandt and the last bar of Mozart will have ceased to be—though possibly a colored canvas and a sheet of notes will remain—because the last eye and the last ear accessible to their message will have gone"; and

WHEREAS, as an early indication of civilization decline, Oswald Spengler added, "When the ordinary thought of a highly cultivated people begins to regard 'having children' as a question of pro's and con's, the great turning point has come"; and

WHEREAS, as another indication of decline, Oswald Spengler observed, "Through money, democracy [as the inevitable sign of a Civilization in the last phases of its decline] becomes its own destroyer, after money has destroyed intellect"; and

WHEREAS, as yet another characteristic of any civilization in decline, Spengler asserted, too, that "The press today is an army with carefully organized weapons, the journalists its officers, the readers its soldiers. The reader neither knows nor is supposed to know the purposes for which he is used and the role he is to play. What is truth? For the multitude, that which it continually reads and hears"; and

WHEREAS, in a period of decline, Oswald Spengler writes, "The common man wants nothing of life but health, longevity, amusement, comfort—'happiness.' He who does not despise this should turn his eyes from world history, for it contains nothing of the sort. The best that history has created is great suffering [because] optimism is cowardice"; and

WHEREAS, in assaying the state of Western civilization, Oswald Spengler informed his readers that, "We have not chosen this time. We cannot help it if we are born as men of the early winter of full Civilization, instead of on the golden summit of a ripe Culture, in a Phidias or a Mozart time. Everything depends on our seeing our own position, our destiny, clearly, on our realizing that though we may lie to ourselves about it, we cannot evade it. He who does not acknowledge this in his heart, ceases to be counted among the men of his generation, and remains either a simpleton, a charlatan, or a pedant"; and

WHEREAS, Spengler concluded, "We are born into this time and must bravely follow the path to the destined end. There is no other way. Our duty is to hold on to the lost position, without hope, without rescue, like that Roman soldier whose bones were found in front of a door in Pompeii, who, during the eruption of Vesuvius, died at his post because they forgot to relieve him. That is greatness. That is what it means to be a thoroughbred. The honorable end is the one thing that cannot be taken from a man"; and

WHEREAS, Professor John Farrenkopf, who earned his doctoral degree in foreign affairs from The University of Virginia, has established himself as the world's leading English-speaking scholar on the life and works of Oswald Spengler, including especially *Decline of the West*; and

WHEREAS, Professor John Farrenkopf is the author of the acclaimed *Prophet of Decline: Spengler on World History and Politics*; and

WHEREAS, Professor John Farrenkopf will present his latest scholarship on Oswald Spengler at an upcoming forum to be held in Richmond; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, That the life and legacy of Oswald Spengler be commemorated on the centennial of the appearance in English of *Decline of the West*; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Professor John Farrenkopf, long a resident of Charlottesville now on the faculty of Wofford College, South Carolina, for his admirable contributions to scholarship on the significance of the life and writings of Oswald Spengler.