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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 141

Offered January 21, 2022

Designating October, in 2022 and in each succeeding year, as Hindu Heritage Month in Virginia.

Patron—Subramanyam

Committee Referral Pending

WHEREAS, Virginia has greatly benefited from the extraordinary cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of its residents; and

WHEREAS, there are an estimated one billion Hindus worldwide and approximately 2.23 million Hindu Americans in the United States; and

WHEREAS, Virginia is home to a significant Hindu American population, representing diverse ethnic backgrounds, including individuals of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Malaysian, Indonesian, Afghani, Nepali, Bhutanese, Sri Lankan, Fijian, Caribbean, and European descent; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans have contributed to life in the Commonwealth through the application of the Vedanta philosophy, Ayurvedic medicine, classical Indian art, dance, music, meditation, yoga, literature, and community service; and

WHEREAS, 2021 marks the 128th anniversary of when Hinduism was officially introduced to the United States by Swami Vivekananda at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago and the 121st anniversary of when he founded the Vedanta Society in San Francisco in 1900; and

WHEREAS, Hindus are primarily an immigrant community and first started immigrating to the United States in the early 1900s, and arrived in increasing numbers after the lifting of the Asian Exclusion Act of 1924 in 1943 and the abolishment of quotas for immigrants based on national origin in 1965; and

WHEREAS, most Hindu immigrants have come to the United States as students, in search of better economic opportunities, or to unite with family members, while others have arrived in this country after facing religious persecution in their countries of origin; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans and the Vedanta philosophy have significantly influenced notable intellectuals such as President John Adams, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, J.D. Salinger, Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley, Huston Smith, and Joseph Campbell; and

WHEREAS, the first Hindu temple in the United States was built in San Francisco, and at the dedication of the temple on January 7, 1906, it was proclaimed to be the "First Hindu Temple in the Whole Western World"; and

WHEREAS, there are now Hindu temples, religious centers, and cultural centers throughout the Commonwealth and the United States; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans have greatly enriched the Commonwealth's higher education system by teaching numerous students, especially in the academic fields of astrophysics, computer science, engineering, law, planetary science, psychology, and neuroscience, and a majority of Hindu Americans are in high-skill occupations; and

WHEREAS, 77 percent of Hindu American adults have a college degree and nearly 50 percent of Hindu American adults have a postgraduate degree, according to the Pew Research Center; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans share the entrepreneurial spirit of America and contribute to the Commonwealth's economic vitality, growth, and wellbeing; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans have also contributed to many of the Commonwealth's economic sectors and have particularly excelled in the areas of business, law, politics, information technology, medicine, and science; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans now serve in various levels of government across the Commonwealth and nation, including three members of the United States House of Representatives; and

WHEREAS, Hindu temples, organizations, and individuals in the Commonwealth actively engage in seva, a Sanskrit word for selfless service, toward their fellow human beings through charity, public service, and the provision of free medical and legal services; and

WHEREAS, Ahimsa, which is the Sanskrit word for nonharm or nonviolence, is a central principle for Hindu Americans, and it provides the ethical foundation for vegetarianism, environmentalism, and harmonious living; and

WHEREAS, Hindu Americans throughout the Commonwealth celebrate numerous holidays and festivals, such as Diwali, which commemorates the victory of good over evil and knowledge over ignorance; and

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59 WHEREAS, despite their positive contributions to the Commonwealth and the nation, Hindu
60 Americans face stereotypes and misconceptions about their heritage and have been the targets of
61 bullying, discrimination, hate speech, and bias-motivated crimes; and

62 WHEREAS, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Hate Crimes Statistics Report, crimes
63 targeting Hindu Americans are on the rise, as evidenced by eight anti-Hindu hate crime incidents
64 reported in 2019 and the 11 anti-Hindu hate crime incidents reported in 2020; and

65 WHEREAS, one out of three Hindu American students reported that they have been bullied in school
66 for their religious beliefs according to the Hindu American Foundation's 2015 study on bullying and bias
67 against Hindu students; and

68 WHEREAS, Hinduphobia, defined as a set of antagonistic, destructive, and derogatory attitudes and
69 behaviors toward Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism) and Hindus that may manifest as prejudice, fear, or
70 hatred, is also increasing in the United States, especially on college campuses, in parallel with the rise
71 of anti-Hindu hate crimes; and

72 WHEREAS, many Hindus and their families in the Commonwealth and the United States face an
73 uncertain future due to inequitable immigration policies and decades-long backlogs for green cards; and

74 WHEREAS, Hindu Americans promote the ideals of pluralism, religious freedom, and mutual
75 respect, which are inherent to their teachings, and the Vedas, the ancient sacred texts of Hinduism,
76 provide the basis for these core principles: "Truth is one, the wise call it by many names" (Ekam sat
77 viprah bahudha vadanti); and

78 WHEREAS, during the month of October, all Virginians are encouraged to increase awareness,
79 understanding, and appreciation of Hindu American history and traditions and seek opportunities to
80 support and engage with the Hindu American community; now, therefore, be it

81 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly designate
82 October, in 2022 and in each succeeding year, as Hindu Heritage Month in Virginia; and, be it

83 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution
84 to the Hindu American Foundation so that members of the organization may be apprised of the sense of
85 the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter; and, be it

86 RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates post the designation of this month
87 on the General Assembly's website.