

NEWS RELEASE

Congressman Walter B. Jones

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JONES INTRODUCES BILL TO PROTECT PRAYER IN OUR MILITARY ACADEMIES

“I find it incredibly ironic that liberal organizations like the ACLU are attempting to take away the very freedoms that these students are willing to go to war to protect.”

Washington, D.C.- Third District Representative Walter B. Jones, senior Member of the House Armed Services Committee, today introduced H.R. 2999, the Military Academy First Amendment Protection Act. The bill is an effort to protect the religious rights of our men and women within our military academies.

If passed, the bill would ensure by law the ability of the military service academies to include the offering of a voluntary, nondenominational prayer as an element of their activities.

The concept of the legislation was born when Congressman Jones witnessed the ACLU’s attempt to strip our military schools of their rights bit by bit. In May 2001, the Virginia Chapter of the American Civil Liberty Union sued the Virginia Military Institute on behalf of two former cadets who opposed the non-denominational pre-supper prayer. In April 2003, a three-judge panel of the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, VA decided in favor of the ACLU arguing that the grace ritual violated the First Amendment. Since then, the Maryland chapter of the ACLU has targeted the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis.

After sending a letter to President Bush urging him to intervene and protect the academies from these liberal attacks, Congressman Jones decided to introduce H.R. 2999.

“We cannot allow this kind of attack on our nation’s military academies to continue. I find it incredibly ironic that liberal organizations like the ACLU are attempting to take away the very freedoms that these students are willing to go to war to protect,” Congressman Jones said today following the bill’s introduction. “If a student wants to give thanks before a meal, he or she should be allowed to do so without the ACLU coming after them. By virtue of educations rooted in the principles of our Founding Fathers and steeped in the traditions of our great military services, our future officers have gained respect for God and country as they have moved through military academies. Now one of those traditions, the act of community prayer before meals, during special events and other activities, is under attack. H.R. 2999 will protect prayer at the United States’ Military, Naval and Air Force Academies. I can only hope that my colleagues will stand with me and act to ensure the protection of our future military heroes’ first amendment rights.”

For additional information or to schedule an interview with Congressman Walter B. Jones please contact Lanier Swann at (202) 225-3415.