



# NEWS RELEASE

## Congressman Walter B. Jones

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### JONES INTRODUCES BILL TO PROTECT PRAYER IN OUR MILITARY ACADEMIES

*"We cannot allow this kind of attack on the traditions of our nation's military academies to continue."*

**Washington, D.C.-** Last evening Third District Representative Walter B. Jones, senior Member of the House Armed Services Committee, introduced the Military Academy First Amendment Protection Act. Congressman Jones is honored to have the support of Representative Madeleine Bordallo of Guam, a Democratic Member of the House Armed Services Committee and original co-sponsor of the bill. The legislation 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 away the right of military schools to organize non-denominational prayer. 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 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, VA decided in favor of the ACLU arguing that the grace ritual violated the First Amendment.

More recently, the Anti-Defamation League has targeted the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis for a similar practice of non-denominational pre-supper prayer. In a letter to the Superintendent of the United States Naval Academy, Vice Admiral Rodney P. Rempt, the Anti-Defamation League claims, "VMI's regular mealtime prayer put a forbidden 'stamp of approval' on religious observance. So does the Naval Academy's traditional ritual, and it should stop now."

Congressman Jones originally introduced the Military Academy First Amendment Protection Act in September 2003, after sending a letter to President Bush urging him to intervene and protect the academies from these attacks. Jones's legislation will codify the existing policy, which allows each respective Academy to have a prayer if it chooses and in accordance with tradition. In the case of Annapolis, this bill would protect its more than 150-year tradition.

"We cannot allow this kind of attack on the traditions of our nation's military institutions to continue," Congressman Jones said last evening following the bill's introduction. "Since their founding, America's military academies have instilled our military leaders with the principles of our Founding Fathers and the traditions of our great military services. These future officers are taught respect for God, country, and the spiritual faith of the men and women serving under them. Now one of those traditions, the act of community prayer before meals, during special events, and other activities, is under attack. The Military Academy First Amendment Protection Act will protect prayer at the United States' Military, Naval and Air Force Academies. I am confident that my colleagues in both houses of Congress 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 Kathleen Joyce at (202) 225-3415.**