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Wednesday, January 18, 2006

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29 ORGANIZATIONS JOIN JONES' CALL TO PROTECT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR MILITARY CHAPLAINS

Washington, D.C.— Echoing concerns expressed by Third District Representative Walter B. Jones (NC-3) and more than 70 Members of Congress in an October 25th letter to President Bush, leaders from 29 different organizations have signed a letter urging President Bush to protect the religious freedom of military chaplains. These various organizations represent millions of Americans throughout the country.

The groups' December letter to President Bush reads:

Time and again you have correctly stated that "Freedom is not America's gift to the world, it is the almighty God's gift to every man and woman in this world." The recent elections in Iraq visibly demonstrate the wonders of liberty.

Unfortunately, there is a threat to freedom within the United States that is surprising to the average observer and gravely disappointing to those closer to the situation. It has come to our attention that many chaplains in the military, specifically the Air Force and Navy, are being prohibited from faithfully practicing the faith of their civilian sponsor in accordance with the doctrinal and practical standards of the same. While US Code Title 10 Section 6031 directly permits chaplains to preach and practice their particular faith, various rulings by military superiors have stripped this law of its effectiveness.

One example in particular is that of an Evangelical Episcopal chaplain with status as a Catholic lay-reader. This chaplain has been cited negatively by his superiors for among other things praying in the name of Jesus, seeking to procure kosher foods for a Jewish sailor, and opposition to quota-driven attendance at a homosexual-led service during Fleet Week. According to the First Amendment and US Code Title 10 Section 6031, this chaplain has perfect freedom to minister according to the dictates of his faith, but currently his job may be on the line for these activities due to reckless disregard of his freedoms.

We, the undersigned, represent millions of Americans committed to the freedoms that have made this country great. At this time of year, Christians, Jews, and Muslims all enjoy the freedom of religion that was seminal at the settling and founding of this beacon of freedom called the United States. We respectfully urge

you to sign an Executive Order to enforce law in effect since 1860. US Code Title 10 Section 6031 says "An officer in the Chaplain Corps may conduct public worship according to the manner and forms of the church of which he is a member." Your commitment to freedom, your commitment to the military, and your commitment to faith all are obvious and admired. We ask you to act on each of these commitments simultaneously by signing an Executive Order on behalf of true religious freedom for our military chaplains.

The letter's signatories include leaders from the following organizations: Advance USA, American Association of Christian Schools, American Family Association, American Values, Association of Christian Schools International, Association of Maryland Families, The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, Center for Reclaiming America, Christian Coalition of America, Coalition for Marriage and Family, Concerned Women for America, ConservativeHQ.com, Conservative Leadership PAC, The Family Foundation (Kentucky), Fidelis, Free Congress Foundation, American Family Association of Indiana, The Inspiration Television Networks, Let Freedom Ring, Inc., Liberty Counsel & Liberty University, American Family Association of Michigan, North American Mission Board, New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms, Point of View Radio, Religious Freedom Coalition, RightMarch.com, South Dakota Family Policy Council, Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, and Tennessee Eagle Forum.

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

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