



NEWS RELEASE

Congressman Walter B. Jones

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JONES CONDEMNS IRS DECISION TO STOP CHURCHES FROM PRAYING FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

"I am outraged that in America, the land of the free where men and women have given their lives for freedom, we are now faced with a federal government that is trying to control prayer."

Washington, D.C.- Third District Representative Walter B. Jones was enraged today by an IRS announcement that churches will risk their tax-exempt status if they pray for the election of either President Bush or Senator Kerry. The IRS statement came in response to an official request for clarification on the tax law.

The American Center for Law and Justice sent a letter to the IRS on behalf of Reverend Patrick J. Mahoney of the Christian Defense Coalition. Mahoney received a letter from the IRS in June reminding tax-exempt organizations that they must be careful not to risk their tax-exempt status during this political season. Reverend Mahoney had concerns about the broad nature of the law, so the ACLJ asked the IRS to address implications of an organized prayer.

"Reverend Mahoney respectfully requests guidance on these issues from the Service: Does a church that enjoys the benefit of being a tax-exempt organization jeopardize its tax-exempt status when a guest speaker offers prayers for the accomplishment of God's will for the coming election? Does such a church jeopardize its status when its guest speaker prays specifically for the election of or the defeat of a candidate for political office?"

Today Reverend Mahoney received the IRS response, which concedes that prayer in favor of either candidate would be viewed by the government agency as a violation of the tax code, placing in jeopardy its tax exempt status.

"This is a complete infringement on the right to free exercise of religion," Jones said. "The government should never be in the business of telling religious institutions how to pray. This is just one more step by Big Brother to stifle the free speech of our religious leaders. The moral foundation of America is built upon Judeo-Christian values, and if America is going to survive as a moral nation then the 1st Amendment right of our spiritual leaders must be protected."

Congressman Jones is a long-time advocate of free speech for religious leaders. He has introduced legislation to change the tax code so that clergy of all faiths would be able to speak out on the moral and political issues of the day without jeopardizing their church's tax exempt status. HR 235, the Houses of Worship Free Speech Restoration Act, was introduced by Jones at the beginning of the 108th Congress and remains one of his top legislative priorities.

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