



NEWS RELEASE

Congressman Walter B. Jones

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 7, 2004

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AFRICAN-AMERICAN CLERGY JOIN JONES AND OTHER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS IN CALLING UPON HOUSE AND SENATE TO RESTORE FREE SPEECH TO HOUSES OF WORSHIP

*Congressmen Jones, Cantor, and Hayes join Clergy United to express support for
HR 235 and call upon Congressional leadership to act*

Washington, D.C.- Third District Representative Walter B. Jones, joined by Congressman Eric Cantor (VA-07) and Congressman Robin Hayes (NC-08), participated today in a press conference with ministers from Clergy United in support of HR 235, the Houses of Worship Freedom of Speech Restoration Act.

Clergy United leader, Bishop Anthony Muse, called upon the Congressional Black Caucus to back Jones' bill and push for its passage: "There is a muzzle upon the clergy. As ministers, we are obligated to speak about the moral and political issues of the day, and taking away that right is harassment. It is wrong, and it is extortion. To the black Caucus, we need you here. This is our time to speak out. We need the entire religious community to come together now- black and white, people of all faiths- and say, 'this is our right, this is our time.' "

"I truly believe there is no future for America unless our preachers are allowed to speak freely about what God puts into their hearts and minds," Jones said. "There would have been no civil rights movement without ministers speaking out for freedom, and we must give that right back to our great ministers like those here today with me. I thank these ministers and pastors here for joining me, as well as two of my good friends and colleagues, Congressman Cantor and Congressman Hayes. This is a fight we must not give up because it is about saving morality for the future of this great country."

Bishop Muse was joined by about 50 other ministers with Clergy United who all wanted to demonstrate their passion for protecting the moral and religious voice in America.

One minister, Pastor Carlton Preston, invoked the late President Reagan's famous Brandenburg Gate speech: "As Reagan said 'Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,' I say today tear down this religious wall and let our preachers speak their minds."

Congressman Cantor, a member of the House leadership as Chief Deputy Majority Whip, referenced the unintended change in the tax code that resulted in the suppression of speech. A Lyndon B Johnson amendment from 1954 changed the tax code thereafter putting churches at risk of losing their tax-exempt status if their ministers spoke out about the moral and political issues of the day.

“It is time to insist we bury the LBJ rule and correct this injustice to America’s religious leaders,” Cantor said. “We must reaffirm the First Amendment Right of religious leaders to speak out on issues of importance. That was the original intent of the Framers of the Constitution, but since LBJ the system has been used and abused to misconstrue the Constitution.”

HR 235 is authored by Congressman Jones and is co-sponsored by 165 other members of the U.S. House of Representatives, including Congressmen Hayes and Cantor. After being introduced by Jones in January of 2003, the bill was referred to the Ways and Means committee where it remains. Congress is expected to adjourn for the election period tomorrow, Friday, October 7th.

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