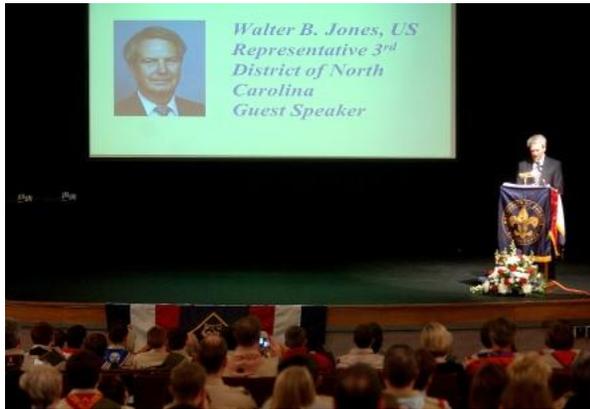


Retaining morality

Congressman Jones speaks to Boy Scout group at ceremony



Congressman Walter B. Jones, U.S. Representatives 3rd District, speaks at the East Carolina Council Eagle Scout and Volunteer Recognition Reception Sunday at Lenoir Community College's Waller Auditorium.

Janet S. Carter / The Free Press

By Jessika Morgan / Staff Writer

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The “challenges” of Boy Scouts of America were lightened by Congressman Walter Jones’ address to a 2012 class of Eagle Scouts.

Jones was the keynote speaker for the East Carolina Council Eagle Scout and Volunteer Recognition Reception on Sunday.

“There are challenges to our youth organizations,” Jones said after expressing thanks to the scouting audience in Lenoir Community College’s Waller Auditorium. “In my humble opinion, they are very unfair challenges. ... Things have changed a lot, but there’s one thing that cannot change: that is morality, that is integrity, that is honesty.

“That’s what Boy Scouts teaches.”

After the program, Jones said it’s a “tough time” for BSA. There has been an ongoing debate about whether gay scouts and leaders should be admitted into the organization. As of now, there is a ban, but an executive board will vote in May on whether or not the rule should be lifted. The anticipated decision was schedule for Feb. 4, initially.

“I am a person that believes all people ... are a gift from God,” Jones said. “I would respect a person’s opinion who does not agree with me, but I would hate to see an element try to impose their will on programs from children. ... I very much resent and regret that there’s an element that’s trying to enforce their beliefs on scouting.”

He told 162 Eagle Scouts — the third largest East Carolina Council class — that maintaining the morals instilled in them from scouting will trickle into their adult life.

“The principles and the values of scouting will help you stand full as you move down the road of life,” Jones, a former boy scout, said about earning Eagle Scout honors. “It’s something no one can ever take from you.”

The congressman said he wanted to alter his speech after he saw the “Building the Flag” program conducted before he took the stage.

Four Revolutionary era enactors told the story of the flag through poems. They prompted audience participation as they went through the 50 stars representing each of America’s states, asking people to shout their state’s nickname as it was called — and of course a thunderous “Tar Heel State” sounded as North Carolina was mentioned.

The young men who earned Eagle Scout decorations accounted for 6 percent of the East Carolina Council members, which was 1 percent more than the national BSA average in 2012; six Silver Beaver award recipients were also honored during the ceremony.

“It’s been a remarkable journey, I’ve really enjoyed all of it,” said Eagle Scout Steven Tulevech Jr. “A lot of people have contributed to my success today and in the past year.”

Tulevech, 15, was joined at the recognition ceremony by his parents Carol and Steve. He has been a boy scout since second grade and said his favorite part of membership is the community service.

“It’s a very proud moment for us,” Carol said. “He’s worked really, really hard.”

His dad, Steve, is an assistant scout master with his troop and said it was meaningful to see all of the scouts honored.

“These are the future leaders of tomorrow,” Steve said. “I think it’s just a fantastic opportunity for them.”

He said Jones noted an important message for the children.

“It’s a great thing to have him here,” he said. “People are in support of such a great cause and cultivating our leaders of tomorrow.”

Scout Executive Ray Franks said Jones “stated our most important purpose, and that’s to build youth.”