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John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Essay Contest Winner Spotlights Congressman's Change of Heart on Iraq War

– Winning Essay Profiles Former U.S. Representative Walter B. Jones, Jr. of North Carolina –

Boston, MA—The John F. Kennedy Library Foundation today announced that **Noah Durham, a junior at Cape Fear Academy in Wilmington, North Carolina**, has won the national *John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Essay Contest for High School Students*. The winning essay describes the political courage of Walter B. Jones Jr., a Republican U.S. Representative from North Carolina who in 2005 declared his opposition to the Iraq War, a position which challenged the policies of President George W. Bush and his administration. Durham describes how after learning that the justification for the invasion was based on flawed intelligence, Jones reversed his initial support for the war. With his reversal, the essay argues that Jones risked his reelection in a district that voted overwhelmingly for Bush in 2004 and that included Camp Lejeune, one of the nation's largest Marine Corps bases. For his unpopular stand, Jones faced fierce anger from constituents, primary challengers in subsequent elections, and lost his standing within the Republican Party.

Durham will receive a \$10,000 scholarship award for his accomplishment.

The contest is sponsored by the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation and generously supported by **John Hancock**.

[\[Click here to read the winning essay.\]](#)

The annual *Profile in Courage Essay Contest* invites high school students from across the nation to write an essay on an act of political courage by a U.S. elected official. The contest is a companion program of the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award™, named for Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Profiles in Courage*, which recounts the stories of eight U.S. senators who risked their careers, incurring the criticism of constituents or powerful interest groups, by taking principled stands for unpopular positions. This year, 2,787 essays were submitted from students in fifty states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and from U.S. citizens in Colombia, France, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and Trinidad and Tobago. This represents the highest number of submissions in the contest's history.

Durham's winning essay traces Congressman Jones's journey from stalwart supporter to vocal critic of the war in Iraq. The essay recounts the profound impact a marine sergeant's funeral had

on Jones and caused him to question his initial backing of the military attack. Durham describes how the conservative congressman, in seeking answers, discovered the invasion was based on flawed intelligence and was “mortified that the [Bush] administration misled the American public and himself to justify the war.” The essay outlines how Jones then reversed his stand and publicly opposed a war initiated by the president of his own party. Durham writes, “Jones certainly sacrificed power for criticizing the war” including being passed over to serve as the ranking Republican on the Armed Services Committee and losing his membership on the Financial Services Panel.

“Each year, the Profile in Courage Essay Contest introduces thousands of young people to the concept of political courage and its importance in our democratic society,” said Rachel Flor, Executive Director of the Kennedy Library Foundation. “Noah’s essay is not only well researched, but it also tells a compelling story of how elected officials can make a difference when they stand up for the greater good. We congratulate him for his extraordinary accomplishment.”

“We congratulate Noah Durham for this well-deserved recognition,” said Tom Crohan, VP and Counsel, Corporate Responsibility & Government Relations, John Hancock. “It is an honor for us at John Hancock to help celebrate outstanding young people like Noah and all of the students who wrote about meaningful acts of political courage that have helped move our country forward.

Durham’s \$10,000 prize is a joint award from the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation and John Hancock.

Durham was drawn to the contest because of his deep interest in history and politics. He chose his essay subject because Jones represented a neighboring district, and after passing away in February 2019, the Congressman’s remarkable contributions were on Durham’s mind. Also, Jones’s district has been home to Durham’s mother and many extended family members, including Durham’s great aunt who was Jones’s elementary school teacher.

Durham competes in Lincoln-Douglas debates as a member of his school’s debate team and also participates in his school’s mock trial team, math team, varsity tennis team, and Honor Council. He is involved with North Carolina Youth and Government and serves as a volunteer defense attorney for New Hanover County Teen Court which provides alternative adjudication for first-time youth offenders. Finally, Durham is a Boy Scout of the highest rank -- Eagle Scout.

Durham’s nominating teacher, Mr. Nathan Gergel, will receive a John F. Kennedy Public Service Grant in the amount of \$500 to be used for school projects that encourage student leadership and civic engagement.

Margaret Ackerly, a sophomore at **Project 1523** in **Richmond, Virginia**, was selected as the second-place winner for her essay on John Spellman, former Governor of Colorado. She will receive a \$3,000 prize for this recognition.

Five students were recognized as finalists in the competition: **Jacqueline Atchley**, a sophomore at **Paul. D. Schreiber High School in Port Washington, New York**, for her essay on Jason West, former Mayor of New Paltz, New York; **Derek Jiang**, a junior at **Stephen F. Austin High School in Sugar Land, Texas**, for his essay on Steve Gunderson, former U.S. Representative (WI); **Talia Kahan**, a junior at **Stuyvesant High School in New York, New York**, for her essay on J. Press Reddoch, former Sheriff of Jones County, Mississippi; **Andrew Lu**, a junior at the **Harker School in San Jose, California**, for his essay on Margaret Chase Smith, former U.S. Senator (ME); **Andrew Tortoriello**, a junior at the **Packer Collegiate Institute** in Brooklyn, New York, for his essay on Ralph Carr, former Governor, Colorado. Each finalist will receive a \$1,000 prize.

Eight students were recognized as semifinalists: **Elena Chen**, a senior at **Homestead High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana**, for her essay on Christopher Louras, former Mayor of Rutland, Vermont; **Kieran Cullen**, a junior at **Hopkins Academy in Hadley, Massachusetts**, for his essay on Barbara Lee, U.S. Representative (CA); **Julia Dvorak**, a senior at **Homestead High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana**, for her essay on Joe Donnelly, former U.S. Senator (IN); **Alp Ekmekcioglu**, a junior at **John Randolph Tucker High School in Henrico, Virginia** for his essay on Lawrence Hogan, former U.S. Representative (MD); **James Fleenor**, a senior at **Fleenor Academy in El Paso, Texas**, for his essay on Justin Amash, U.S. Representative (MI); **William Harris**, a senior at **Charlotte Country Day School in Charlotte, North Carolina** for his essay on Dennis Kucinich, former Mayor of Cleveland, Ohio; **Ariane Lee**, a junior at **Syosset High School in Syosset, New York**, for her essay on Heidi Heitkamp, former U.S. Senator (ND); **Michelle Miao**, a sophomore at **Talawanda High School in Oxford, Ohio**, for her essay on Ralph Carr, former Governor, Colorado. Each semifinalist will receive a \$100 prize.

Ten students received honorable mention and are listed, along with winners, finalists, and semifinalists at www.jfklibrary.org/essaycontest.

The John F. Kennedy Library Foundation created the **John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award** in 1989 to honor President Kennedy's commitment and contribution to public service and to celebrate his May 29th birthday. The award is presented annually to public servants who have made courageous decisions of conscience without regard for the personal or professional consequences. The award is named for President Kennedy's 1957 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Profiles in Courage*.

The recipients of this prestigious award for political courage are selected by a distinguished bipartisan committee of national, political, and community leaders. **Martha Minow**, 300th Anniversary University Professor, Harvard University, former dean, Harvard Law School chairs the 15-member committee. Committee members are **Stacey Abrams**, former Georgia House Democratic Leader; **David Axelrod**, Political Strategist and Founder, the Institute of Politics at The University of Chicago; **Joaquin Castro**, Congressman, (D-TX 20th District); **Christopher Dodd**, Senior Counsel for Arnold & Porter, former U.S. Senator (D-Connecticut); former U.S. Congresswoman **Donna F. Edwards** (D-Maryland); **Adam Frankel**, Vice President, Corporate and Executive Communications at PepsiCo, former Speechwriter to President Barack Obama; **Sherrilyn Ifill**, President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund; **Bob Inglis**, (R-South Carolina), former U.S. Congressman and Profile in Courage Award

Honoree; **Caroline Kennedy**, former U.S. Ambassador to Japan and Honorary President of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation; **Marne Levine**, VP of Global Partnerships and Business Development at Facebook; **Beth Myers**, Principal, Buckminster Strategies; **Ronald L. Sargent**, Chairman, John F. Kennedy Library Foundation; **Jack Schlossberg**, Grandson of President Kennedy

This contest is supported by John Hancock, a part of Manulife Financial Corporation (MFC), a leading international financial services group with principal operations in Asia, Canada and the United States. Operating as Manulife Financial in Canada and Asia, and primarily as John Hancock in the United States, our group of companies offers clients a diverse range of financial protection products and wealth management services through an extensive network of employees, agents and distribution partners.

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The John F. Kennedy Library Foundation is a 501(c)(3), non-profit organization founded in 1984 to provide financial support, staffing, and creative resources for the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, a presidential library administered by the National Archives and Records Administration. The Kennedy Presidential Library and the Kennedy Library Foundation seek to promote, through educational and community programs, a greater appreciation and understanding of American politics, history, and culture, the process of governing and the importance of public service.