



NEWS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL DEC. 5, 2005

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2006 First Freedom Award Recipients Announced

*Council for America's First Freedom Hosts 12th Annual Event
Honoring Three Advocates for Religious Liberty*

RICHMOND, Va. (Dec. 5, 2005) - To commemorate the 220th anniversary of the nation's first law guaranteeing religious liberty, the Council for America's First Freedom is presenting the 2006 First Freedom Awards to three distinguished advocates of religious freedom, individuals who have made profound contributions to advancing religious liberty around the world, across the United States and within Virginia.

The 12th annual awards, presented in three categories, will be awarded in Richmond, Va., on January 18, two days following National Religious Freedom Day, to:

- **Václav Havel**, former president of both the Czech Republic and Czechoslovakia, award-winning playwright and passionate global champion of interfaith dialogue and freedom of conscience, will receive the **International First Freedom Award**.
- **The Honorable Chet Edwards**, seven-term U.S. Representative from Waco, Texas and ardent proponent of the nation's founding principle of

church-state separation, will receive the **National First Freedom Award**.

- **Dr. Robert S. Alley**, professor emeritus of Humanities at the University of Richmond, noted author and scholarly authority on religion, government and education, will receive the **Virginia First Freedom Award**.

“These three honorees have dedicated much of their professional lives to the defense of religious liberty,” said Tommy Baer, president of the Council for America’s First Freedom. “They are people of conscience and principles whose insights and courage have helped deepen our collective understanding of religious freedom and fortify the foundation of this inherent human right.”

This year marks the 12th year in which the Council for America’s First Freedom has sponsored the First Freedom Awards, in conjunction with National Religious Freedom Day, observed annually on January 16. Past recipients include Prime Minister Tony Blair of Great Britain; Lawrence Eagleburger, former Secretary of State; Richard C. Holbrooke, chief negotiator of the Dayton Peace Accords and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations; and Dr. Garry Wills, Pulitzer Prize-winning author.

National Religious Freedom Day is observed each year on January 16, the anniversary of the date on which the Virginia General Assembly enacted the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, the landmark law that first guaranteed religious liberty and became the precursor for the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of religion.

Additional biographical information on each recipient is attached. For more information about the awards dinner ceremony, which is open to the news media, please contact Maureen Rosenbaum at (804) 643-1786 or mrosenbaum@firstfreedom.org.

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About the Award Ceremony

The 12th annual First Freedom Awards will be presented at an evening ceremony on January 18, 2006 at The Jefferson Hotel, 101 West Franklin Street, Richmond, Va. The event is by invitation only but is open to members of the news media.

About the Council for America's First Freedom

The Council for America's First Freedom is a 501(c)(3) organization based in Richmond, Va. that provides educational programs, materials and information about religious freedom as an American historical development, as a contemporary controversy, and as an international human right. Currently, the Council is developing the First Freedom Center, a world-class facility that will offer a dynamic visitor experience with state-of-the-art interactive exhibits exploring the development of religious freedom in America, and today's related national and international issues. The Council also sponsors the Presidential Proclamation of National Religious Freedom Day (January), First Freedom Awards, and the First Freedom Student Competition. For more information, please visit www.firstfreedom.org.

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Biographical Information

President Václav Havel (International Award) - Václav Havel served in high office for his country twice, from 1989 - 1992 as President of Czechoslovakia and again from 1993 - 2003 as President of the Czech Republic. Following the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968 Havel was banned from the theater, his earliest passion, and became more politically active. He wrote the now famous "Letter to Husak" in 1975, petitioning the Czechoslovak president about the toxic effects of one-party rule on the character of the people. Havel also co-founded with other dissidents Charter 77, an appeal to the government to respect the basic human rights and freedoms to which Czechoslovakia committed by signing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1975. In 1979, Havel also co-founded the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Oppressed to help dissidents and their families. In the late 1980s as Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia waned Havel played a key role in the demonstrations that lead to the non-violent collapse of one-party rule in Czechoslovakia in late 1989, known globally as the "Velvet Revolution." Václav Havel is a decorated and honored global public citizen. As a former dissident he is a passionate advocate for freedom of conscience and interfaith dialogue globally, particularly through the Shared Concern Initiative.

The Honorable Chet Edwards (National Award) - Congressman Chet Edwards, D-Texas, has represented citizens from North Texas, Central Texas and the Brazos Valley since 1991. Edwards is a proponent of the separation of church and state, underscoring the tenet that government has no place within religion. In remarks on the House floor speech on religious freedom, he said, "Separation of church and state does not mean keeping faith out of government. Rather, it means keeping government out of our faith. By passing language saying 'Congress shall pass no law respecting an establishment of religion,' known as the Establishment Clause, our founding fathers were putting religion on a pedestal so high that the hands of government and politicians could not reach it." Edwards believes that we should educate members of Congress and the American people that the principle of church-state separation was

designed to protect religion, not harm it. Congressman Edwards is the winner of the Walter Cronkite Faith & Freedom Award (2001), "which encourages people of faith and goodwill to stand up for religious freedom."

Dr. Robert S. Alley (Virginia Award) - Robert S. Alley is a professor emeritus of humanities at the University of Richmond, where he taught in the religion department for 30 years. Dr. Alley is a strong proponent of clear separation between church and state. He states, "Only complete separation of church and state, with absolutely no establishment, will guarantee free exercise of religion. To whatever degree a form of establishment, no matter how mild, enters the Constitution through the amending process, free exercise is dust." Alley has authored and co-authored several books on religion, government and education, including *School Prayer: The Court, the Congress, and the First Amendment* (1994). Dr. Alley was the first recipient of the Virginia ACLU Bill of Rights Award in 1994.

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