

US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

TESTIMONY OF HON. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY

May 3rd, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am asking the Committee to consider including two important initiatives, the “Never Forgotten Korean War POW Act” and Service Academy healthcare protection in the FY2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). I represent the United States Military Academy at West Point as well as thousands of military families both active and retired. I have engaged the Veteran community in my district through my Veterans Advisory Board, leaders at West Point, and discussions with local heroes when considering these two initiatives. Our responsibility to honor those who are willing to sacrifice everything does not end when they return home and I appreciate the hard work the Members of this Committee do in that regard.

NEVER FORGOTTEN KOREAN WAR POW ACT

After working alongside Korean War veteran and prisoner of war (POW) Corporal Raymond Mellin of Cornwall, I drafted the Never Forgotten Korean War POW Act to retroactively eliminate a unique and arbitrary three-month limit on combat pay eligibility for Korean War POWs. Corporal Ray Mellin was a POW for 37 months, but his time in an enemy prison wasn’t recognized in the way it should have been.

It's about more than just the money – we should honor all those who have served. The Korean War (1950-1953) is often called “the forgotten war,” and my bill will make sure those heroes are remembered. “My fervent wish is to have this injustice made right, not for the monetary reasons, but to honor the remaining few Korean War POWs,” said Korean War POW Corporal Raymond Mellin.

The Combat Duty Pay Act of 1952 established combat pay for the United States military. Although POWs from the Korean War did qualify for combat pay, the law instituted a three-month limit on their eligibility. The Never Forgotten Korean War POW Act would strike the language which includes the limit and adjust the rate of pay to be consistent with inflation. The VA estimates of the number of Korean War POW Veterans still alive as of August 2017 is 1200. However, the VA does not have complete data for this specific group of Veterans, so the number could be as low as 600 and as high as 1300. This bill will make sure that those who served are fairly compensated and never forgotten.

“Corporal Raymond Mellin is a hero and deserves to be fairly compensated for his time as a POW,” said New York State Assemblyman James Skoufis. “Sadly, it often takes the actions of elected officials to obtain the fair and just compensation due our veterans,” said Director of the Orange County Veterans Service Agency Christian Farrell. We have the opportunity to rectify this injustice and I would urge the Committee to include my legislation in the NDAA.

SERVICE ACADEMY HEALTH CARE PROTECTION

I have the distinct honor of representing the United States Military Academy at West Point in New York's 18th Congressional District. I take my responsibility to the Cadets, Staff, Faculty, and the military families of the Academy seriously, and that includes ensuring they

maintain access to critical health services. As the Department of Defense (DoD) continues its efforts to update the Military Health System Modernization Study, many concerns have been raised that these efforts could lead to significant reductions in services provided by Keller Army Community Hospital at West Point. While I believe that realigning and restructuring military medical treatment facilities throughout DoD is a laudable goal, I believe the unique nature of the United States Military Academy requires foresight on the part the Department and Congress should provide direction to ensure the Academy is able to maintain critical services.

The nature of the exercises and training that cadets perform is inherently dangerous at times and, as such, the Academy requires they have access to several vital services, all of which Keller currently provides. One need look no further than the tragic accident that occurred at the Academy in 2019 involving the rollover of a M1085 medium tactical vehicle which resulted in the death of one cadet and 19 other cadets suffering injuries. The services Keller was able to provide were essential and any effort to reduce or cut these services could result in serious health concerns for cadets who may be involved in other life-threatening situations.

While some of our nation's other Service Academies have access to nearby health systems, West Point is many miles away from the nearest services. Furthermore, a simple view of a map does not reveal the nature of the roads that lead to these other health care facilities. As someone who has driven the winding mountain roads around West Point in the harsh New York winters, I can tell you that accessing health facilities outside of the Academy could take significant time and that is not a luxury we can afford in emergencies.

Fortunately, the House has already made its views on this matter known when it passed my amendment as a part of HR 2500 in July of 2019. Amendment number 269, which was passed by voice vote as a part of Amendment En Bloc number 11, ensured the availability of

certain medical services at U.S. Service Academies, including emergency room services, orthopedic services, and general surgery services for Cadets, military personnel and their families. I believe the House Armed Services Committee should include this or similar language as a part of the FY2022 National Defense Authorization Act base text. Doing so ensures that our nation's future leaders have access to the medical care that they deserve.

CONCLUSION

To close, I again want to thank for the Committee's time and attention to these two important issues today. I would be pleased to respond to questions you or the other Members of the Committee may have. The brave men and women I represent appreciate your leadership on these issues and respect for their service.