

CONGRESSWOMAN MARCY KAPTUR

HASC Members Day Testimony –

4 Minutes of remarks, full testimony can be submitted for record
May 20th, 2025

REP. KAPTUR: “Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and
distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your Committee today. I
look forward to working with you to reform these proposals. As a
Member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, I am grateful for
the partnership that our Committees have forged to ensure that the brave
men and women of the US Armed Forces have the tools they need to
keep our country safe, both at home and abroad. And when they return
home, we must afford them the respect and recognition their service has
earned.

I wish to address four issues for which I seek inclusion as your
Committee develops the FY26 Defense Authorizing bill:

- 1) Expand Congressional engagement in maintaining our Transatlantic relationships and security commitments to NATO, Central Europe, and Ukraine;
- 2) Improve the healthcare benefits provided to Gold Star spouses and children;
- 3) Afford proper and equal VA and DOD health benefits to Guard and Reserve Members who were wounded in combat, but are treated differently for long term eligibility regarding injury and illness treatments, such as for PTSD; and
- 4) Strike a new service medal entitled “Last Servicemember Standing”

First, for at least 76 years, the nations represented by NATO have worked together in mutual self-interest for Liberty and Security under the umbrella of the strongest Alliance for Liberty in history—NATO. However, as we speak, the ever-expanding Spiderweb of Tyranny including Vladimir Putin’s Russian dictatorship, North Korea, and Iran preys again on the people of Ukraine and encroaches on other adjacent

nations that seek to be free. Their actions mirror historic expansionary aggression: the Russian Empire, then the Soviet Union, and now Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Following the 1948 coup in Czechoslovakia by Soviet aligned forces, General Omar Bradley, one of our greatest Generals and NATO's first Chair of the Military Committee, in appealing to Americans of the importance of NATO stated, "I assure you that our frontiers of collective defense lie in common with theirs in the heart of Europe." This remains as true today as it did then.

The fight for Liberty is a global effort. It requires a global response. For our part, Ohioans, like other parts of our country, care deeply about Liberty. We know Liberty's cost. We know its worth. And just like you, we stand in unwavering support of freedom's cause. That is why I call upon this Committee to consider:

- 1) Requiring thorough legislation and early notice mandates to

Congress should any Administration seek to withdraw US troops

below the levels necessary to deter Russian aggression against our Allies; and

- 2) Consider making clear that in negotiating a ceasefire with Ukraine, we will not cede to Russian demands, Putin must be held accountable for the crimes of aggression he has committed against the Ukrainian people. The kidnapping of tens of thousands of Ukrainian children has already been named a war crime by the International Criminal Court.
- 3) In addition, Ukraine through our NATO Alliance must continue to be provided with the weapons and material needed to push Russia inside its own border.

The second request I place before your committee involves my legislation, the “Gold Star Spouse Healthcare Enhancement Act.” This bill will allow surviving spouses and minor children who meet the criteria for a Gold Star lapel button to maintain TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select coverage as “active-duty family members” for as long as they retain eligibility for TRICARE coverage.

Currently, surviving spouses and their minor children only have TRICARE Prime coverage as “active-duty members” for three years following the death of their servicemember. After three years, their coverage changes to that of a retired family member, requiring them to incur additional costs to either continue TRICARE Prime or transition to TRICARE Select.

The debt our nation owes to the brave men and women who make the ultimate sacrifice while serving overseas is not a debt that can be repaid within three years. It is our sacred responsibility to honor their sacrifice by caring for their surviving spouses and minor age children.

The third request involves a gap in current, long term, military health system coverage related to surviving combat veterans who served in the Reserve or Guard. I met with such a group two weeks ago. It’s my understanding that eligibility for longer term health services can expire despite how veterans have endured major combat. No longer are they

eligible for needed care to treat, for example, their serious PTSD that remains raging and debilitating.

I ask that this Committee closely consider this proposal's inclusion in the FY26 NDAA. Together we can pay forward this commitment to care and honor the debt we as a nation owe those who answered the call to service and perished or were seriously wounded in Guard or Reserve units in defense of our nation.

My fourth and final request involves a new Medal. I seek your Committee's authorization for the Department of Defense to perform necessary research and create criteria — including character, circumstance, nature of the battle, war wounds and medical records — to define, strike, and administer the award of a new category of Service Medal acknowledging the heroism and exceptional valor of our “Last Servicemember Standing.”

Presently, the Department of Defense only processes medals for soldiers who have served in battle if there are two living witnesses, that can verify their service. For soldiers who served in horrific battle with all unit soldiers dead but one remaining alive and critically wounded and yet standing ground, the current regulations simply make no sense.

In furtherance of this objective, I have the distinct privilege and responsibility of submitting for the record a story with your Committee, that serves as an example of the situation that would warrant the Medal I am proposing. It both will acknowledge enormous loss of life in battle but does not deny the “Last Soldier Standing” the meritorious medal award they are due for extraordinary service. I respectfully ask for this soldier’s story’s inclusion for the Record. It is a true story of the late Army Cavalry Platoon leader and Vietnam War veteran Sergeant John Eade of Toledo, Ohio. His story well illustrates why I believe such a Medal deserves a place in our nation’s military service awards.

As an Army combat soldier who fought against the Vietnamese Regular forces at LaDrang Valley/Landing Zone Albany, beginning November 17, 1965. That battle is recorded as the costliest battle of the Vietnam War. By the end of the battle every member of his unit had been killed as they were overwhelmed by superior enemy forces and forced to fight hand-to-hand combat for hours exhausting their ammunition.

Left for dead, he was discovered, rescued, and flown out by US forces three days later. His initial recovery in US military hospitals took over a year as he bore serious war wounds lifelong. I never heard him complain once.

Sergeant Eade was awarded the Purple Heart and two Bronze Stars, but he was not eligible for additional medals because DoD regulations state “there were not two living witnesses who survived” to attest to his fierce fight to subdue the enemy and protect his platoon. As platoon Sergeant, he obtained at least two silver stars for his dead colleagues. Therefore, the losses and sacrifices that he, and other servicemembers who found

themselves the sole surviving member of their unit, go insufficiently recognized. We can and must do more to acknowledge their bravery and patriotism.

Thank you, Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith, for the opportunity to speak today to your committee about these vital matters. I look forward to working with you and your staff to develop these proposals and move them across the finish line.