

Thank you Chairwoman Luria and Ranking Member Nehls for hosting today's legislative hearing.

Earlier this year, along with Reps. Seth Moulton and Jason Crow, I introduced HR 2827, the Captain James C. Edge Gold Star Spouse Equity Act. This legislation is named in memory of a Marine Captain James C. Edge who was killed in action in Ramadi, Iraq on April 14, 2005.

I'm thankful that last Congress, this Committee, along with the House Armed Services Committee, finally eliminated the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) and Dependency and Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset, also known as "the widow's tax". This was a great accomplishment that will benefit the veteran community and their surviving spouses.

HR 2827 addresses a separate aspect of those two benefit programs for surviving spouses.

The families of our servicemembers wait for their loved one's safe return, anxiously awaiting to hear their once more. Unfortunately, for some, the knock on their door instead initiates them into a fraternity no family wants to join. That chilling knock changes them forever and makes them part of the Gold Star family.

Under current law, if a Gold Star spouse remarries prior to turning 55, they lose their SBP and DIC benefits. If they remarry after turning 55, the SPB and DIC continues uninterrupted.

I note, until last Congress, spouses would lose their DIC benefits if they remarried prior to turning 57. I'd like to thank Chairman Takano, and then-Ranking Member Roe, for their work to match the DIC remarriage age to the SBP remarriage age. However, we must go further and completely eliminate this "remarriage penalty".

My legislation simply allows surviving spouses to continue to move forward with their lives, allowing them to remarry, free of fear of losing the benefits owed to them from their prior spouse's noble sacrifice.

As a combat veteran and as a Green Beret, this is personal for me. I know that when soldiers take their place on the battlefield, they are prepared to defend America and risk their lives for our freedom.

This is a strategic issue for our volunteer military. It affects recruitment and retention. Some people may hesitate to volunteer if they feel their loved ones will not be taken care of should their worst fears be realized.

The bottom line is, if our family support starts cracking, the entire foundation of our modern military is in trouble. I ask this committee to favorably report this important legislation.

Thank you.