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Signs Petition to Force House Republican Leadership to Allow Vote on Measure
to Provide Full Promised Benefit to Survivors Of Deceased Veterans;
Signs Onto Letter Urging Armed Service Committee Chairman
To Pass Measure As Part of Broader Defense Bill

Washington, DC - In an effort to provide the widows of deceased veterans with the full survivor benefits they were promised through an insurance program called the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP), Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9) this week signed a petition to force the House Republican leadership to bring up for a vote a bill that would reverse a significant cut in the amount of the benefit for those over the age of 62. The House Republican leadership has refused to bring the bill to the floor for a vote despite wide support for the measure. Survivors of veterans, whose deceased loved ones paid premiums to participate in this plan, were originally promised they would receive 55 percent of their loved one's monthly retirement pay once that loved one passed away. That level has since been reduced to 35 percent once the beneficiary reaches the age of 62.

The Military Survivor Benefits Improvement Act, which Rothman is trying to bring to the House floor for a vote, is a bipartisan proposal that would end the "Military Widows' Tax" -- the reduction in the survivor benefit for the widows or dependent children of deceased veterans, that occurs when the beneficiary reaches the age of 62. Rothman also signed a letter to House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter (R-CA52), urging him to include a provision in the Defense Authorization bill to restore the survivor benefit for widows to 55 percent. In New Jersey, nearly 4,000 spouses currently have to deal with the drastic rate cut.

"It is imperative that the House Republican leadership allow a vote on a measure that would rightfully allow the surviving family members of veterans to receive the benefit they were promised and that their loved ones earned," Rothman said. "The spouses of our servicemen and women are heroes themselves who made family sacrifices so that we as Americans could live in peace and security. It is only fair and proper that we provide them with the benefit they paid for and earned."

According to Rothman, the "Survivor Benefit Penalty" will penalize over 200,000 elderly Americans, mostly widows, over the next 10 years, and hundreds of thousands in future years. Over one million military retirees pay premiums for years and anticipate that upon their death, their spouse will receive 55 percent of their retirement benefit. But when their spouse reaches 62, the benefit drops to a mere 35 percent. Military retirees were not told this would happen when they signed up. Just 218 signatures on what is known as a discharge petition would bring this bill to the House floor for consideration. So far, 201 Members have signed the petition.

Rothman said, "We must relieve the financial burden on survivors of veterans who are receiving a significantly smaller benefit than they were first promised. Many of these survivors are forced to choose between paying for rent, food, or medicine because their funding has been cut. Restoring the full benefit is the least we can do to say thank you for all their sacrifices."

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