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**Heller and Manchin Join to Introduce Veterans Small Business Opportunity and Protection Act**

**(Washington, DC) –** Today, U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-NV) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) issued the following statements following introduction of the Veterans Small Business Opportunity and Protection Act:

“I’m proud to team with Senator Manchin to protect the interests of those who serve in our military. After dealing with the loss of a loved one, the last thing the family of a veteran should have to worry about is losing their veteran-owned small business status. This legislation will help veteran-owned family businesses remain eligible for important small business benefits,” **said Senator Dean Heller**.

**Senator Manchin continued,** “Veterans put their lives on the line for our country, and should be confident that their families will be taken care of in times of need.  I am proud to co-sponsor this bill with Senator Heller that helps the spouses and dependents of veteran-owned small businesses after service members pass away from a disability or in the line of duty. I know West Virginians share my commitment to doing anything that we can to help make the grieving process even the slightest bit easier for our veterans’ families.”

**Background**

Current law allows a spouse to continue receiving the veteran small business designation for ten years only if the veteran's death was caused by a disability rated as a 100 percent disabling as a result of active duty service. When a veteran small business owner with a service-connected disability of less than 100 percent dies from causes unrelated to service, the spouse immediately loses those benefits. Furthermore, no legislation was included to address service members who owned businesses that are killed in action.

**The Veterans Small Business Protection Act:**

* Affords surviving spouses or dependents of service members with a service-connected disability rating of less than 100 percent to have three years of eligibility as a service-disabled veteran-owned small business, which provides more time for the family to transition.
* Authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to treat any business left to a spouse or dependent by a member of the Armed Services killed in the line of duty as a veteran-owned business or a disabled-veteran-owned business for purposes of benefit eligibility for 10 years.
* Ensures that surviving spouses or dependents of service members that owned a small business and were killed in action are considered for government contracts.

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