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United States Senate

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**In Advance of Memorial Day, Heller, Merkley Introduce Bill to Expand Education Benefits to Spouses of Fallen Heroes**

**WASHINGTON, DC** – In honor of Memorial Day, U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-NV) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) today introduced the Spouses of Heroes Education Act, which would expand full educational benefits to spouses of service members who die in the line of duty.

“As we honor the memory of those who gave their lives in service to their country this Memorial Day, we must remember that their families have made a great sacrifice. We must also do what we can to help these families whose lives have been changed forever. By ensuring that spouses have access to an education, we can help these families put their lives back together and build bright futures for their children,” said **Senator Dean Heller**.

“This Memorial Day, we remember those who have paid the ultimate price in service to our nation. We also honor their families, who have served and sacrificed alongside our military,” said **Merkley**. “There is no way we can ever repay the sacrifice of a fallen hero’s spouse, but we can honor them by ensuring they have the tools they need to go back to school and provide a foundation for their family.”

Currently, spouses of fallen service members are only eligible to receive federal education benefits under the Survivors’ and Dependents’ Education Assistance Program. This program provides an allowance of up to $936 per month, but it often does not cover the full cost of tuition and fees. The Spouses of Heroes Education Act amends the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill to expand the Fry Scholarship, which provides full in-state tuition and fees to children of service members who have died in the line of duty. This change would allow spouses to receive the full cost of public, in-state undergraduate tuition and fees, plus a monthly living stipend and book allowance. Spouses would need to use this benefit within fifteen years.

 “Military spouses often sacrifice their own careers and professional development to support the service obligations of their loved ones. So when a loved one makes the ultimate sacrifice, we have a duty to provide the right resources for families to get back on their feet,” said **VFW Executive Director Bob Wallace**. “Currently, only surviving children can receive Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits through the Fry Scholarship program. The VFW believes that spouses must be afforded the same opportunities to provide for their family’s future when a loved one dies in the line of duty.”

The bill is endorsed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), the Vietnam Veterans of America, the Air Force Sergeants Association, the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), the American Legion, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), AMVETS, and the Student Veterans of America. In addition, the Veterans Legislative Committee of The Military Coalition (TMC), a coalition comprised of 33 organizations representing more than 5.5 million members of the uniformed services and their families, has established a goal of authorizing surviving spouses to have the same educational benefits as their children.

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