

Ranking Member Richard Burr

## Burr Opening Statement at Veterans' Committee Hearing on Pending Benefits Legislation

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to you and to our witnesses. I'd also like to extend a special welcome to the military spouses who are with us today. Thank you all for being here and, more importantly, thank you for the contributions and sacrifices you make every day on behalf of our nation.

I know we have a long list of bills to discuss today, so I will try to keep my remarks brief. But I do want to take a few moments to comment on three bills I have been working on. The first is S. 475, the Military Spouses Residency Relief Act.

In recent decades, there has been a growing recognition that military spouses play a very important role in the success of our Armed Forces. In fact, "Military Spouse Day" was first proclaimed by President Reagan 25 years ago to recognize (quote) "the profound importance of spouse commitment to the readiness and well-being of service members . . . and to the security of our nation."

Today, the importance and sacrifices of military spouses are just as profound. They move around the country and the world in support of our nation's servicemembers. They leave behind their homes, friends, and jobs in order to put servicemembers and the military ahead of their own needs.

Unfortunately, current laws do little to ease the burden on military spouses and sometimes even add to their confusion and their costs. Under the Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act, the servicemember can continue to vote in the state they consider home, but the spouse cannot. The servicemember's military pay is taxed only in their home state, but the spouse may have to file tax returns in every state they live in. And, in many states, the family assets have to be held solely in the servicemember's name in order to protect them from being taxed by those states.

I'm sure we can all understand the headaches this can cause for military families, as they move to a new state every few years. But, what's worse is the message this sends to military spouses. As the National Military Family Association put it back in 1992 (quote), "the current situation has left many military spouses feeling they are perceived as excess baggage."

Mr. Chairman, I hope we can all agree that this situation should not be allowed to continue. It's time that we finally update our laws to reflect the important role that military spouses play and the tremendous sacrifices they make. I believe this bill would take a step in that direction.

It would allow military spouses to vote and pay taxes in their home states. This should reduce some of the confusion and hassles of moving every time the servicemember is ordered to a new duty station. This bill will also allow military spouses the flexibility to hold property in their own names, something the rest of us probably take for granted.

Perhaps more importantly, it will send a clear message to military spouses that we, as a nation, appreciate their sacrifices and are grateful for the contributions they make every day to the success of our Armed Forces.

I'm pleased that this bill already has 24 Senate cosponsors, including a majority of Members of this Committee. A similar bill introduced by Representative John Carter has the backing of over 90 members of the House. With that widespread support, I hope we can move this bill quickly and provide the long-overdue relief that these unsung heroes of the Armed Forces deserve.

Mr. Chairman, the second bill I want to discuss would eliminate the delay -- now required by law -- in how soon VA disability payments begin after a veteran is medically discharged from the military. It would allow these veterans to leave the military at whatever time best suits their needs, without the stress and financial burden caused by a delay in receiving their VA disability checks. I hope this would help injured servicemembers experience a more seamless transition from active duty to civilian life.

The final bill I want to mention would allow more veterans, such as those with severe traumatic brain injuries, to receive higher amounts of monthly aid and attendance benefits. This would provide them with the financial tools to arrange whatever services they need to live in their own homes -- rather than being institutionalized -- and to integrate as fully as they can into their communities.

For veterans with traumatic brain injuries, like Ted Wade from North Carolina, it would allow them to choose how their needs will be met, give them more flexibility and independence, and ultimately improve the quality of their lives.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate you calling this hearing to discuss these and other bills affecting veterans' benefits. I look forward to working with you and the Members of this Committee to advance legislation that will help improve the lives of servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

I thank the Chair.