

CONGRESSWOMAN MARCY KAPTUR

HASC Members Day Testimony

4 Minutes of remarks, full testimony can be submitted for record

April 15th, 2026

CONGRESSWOMAN KAPTUR: Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today. I look forward to working with you to craft bipartisan defense legislation for Fiscal Year 2027 that meets the urgent needs of safeguarding our nation. As a Member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, I am grateful for the partnership that our Committees have forged to ensure that the brave men and women of the US Armed Forces have the support and tools they need to keep our country safe.

I wish to highlight three important issues—strengthening support for our European Allies, taking care of our Gold Star Families, and honoring World War II hero Rear Admiral Alene Duerk, for which I recommend the Committee include relevant legislation in the FY27 NDAA.

First, for nearly eight decades the United States has been strengthened by its leadership of NATO, the most powerful and successful military alliance in human

history. Today, the threat of continued Russian aggression presents the gravest security threat to American interests on the European continent and to European security in modern history. Dictator Vladimir Putin and the ever-expanding Spiderweb of Tyranny—represented by China, North Korea, and Iran—are emboldened as Washington’s commitment to our Allies comes into question.

But we are not alone in this fight. Europe is taking greater ownership of its defense, and we all saw how our Ukrainian allies came to our defense when US forces in the Middle East were under fire from Iran. The Ukrainians have offered us their expertise and innovative defense technology, and the United States should take them up on their offer of partnership.

We are in a global fight for Liberty, and we are called upon to take greater action to defend it. That is why I call upon this Committee to consider:

- 1) Strengthening the deployment of US forces in Europe, including through the consideration of a new permanent posting on the Eastern Flank to deter future Russian aggression;
- 2) Investing in our successful defense partnership with Ukraine not only by providing the weapons the Ukrainian people need to defend themselves, but also by deepening coproduction of innovative defense technologies. We

must ensure that the United States implements the lessons learned from Ukraine's experience defending against Russia.

Second, I respectfully request that the Committee include Mr. Bacon and I's **Gold Star Spouse Healthcare Enhancement Act** in the FY27 NDAA. This bill would ensure that surviving spouses who qualify for the Gold Star Lapel Button may continue receiving TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select coverage as active-duty family members for as long as they remain otherwise eligible for TRICARE.

Under current law, surviving spouses retain that status for only three years after the death of their servicemember. After that point, they are shifted to retired family member status and forced to absorb additional costs in order to keep TRICARE Prime or move to TRICARE Select. That change places a new financial burden on families who have already made the greatest sacrifice that any military family may endure.

This legislation reflects a simple but profound principle: the debt we owe Gold Star families cannot be measured in years, and it should never be repaid with higher healthcare costs. I think today of the words of President Abraham Lincoln, which are carved onto the Department of Veterans Affairs, calling on us to "care for Him

who shall have borne the Battle, and for his Widow, and his Orphan.” Their sacrifice will be lifelong—and our duty is to ensure they receive the care they need.

I also request that the Committee include Mr. Latta and I’s bill, the **Rear Admiral Alene Duerk Ship Renaming Act of 2025**. This bill expresses the sense of Congress that the Secretary of the Navy should name a United States naval vessel the **USS Rear Admiral Alene Duerk** in honor of a remarkable American whose service to our Nation was both historic and deeply consequential.

Rear Admiral Duerk was born in Defiance, Ohio, graduated from the Toledo Hospital School of Nursing, and answered the call to serve during World War II by accepting a commission in the Nurse Corps of the United States Naval Reserve. She cared for wounded servicemembers at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, at Bethesda, and later aboard the USS Benevolence in the Pacific Theater, where she treated casualties from Third Fleet operations until the end of the war. At a time of tremendous danger and sacrifice, she served with skill, compassion, and unwavering devotion to those who had borne the battle.

Her service did not end with the war. Over the years, she continued to rise through positions of increasing responsibility in both the Navy Reserve and on active duty, serving across the United States and overseas. In 1972, she broke one of the military's highest barriers when she became the first woman in Navy history to attain flag rank. That achievement reflected pure merit in a career defined by excellence, leadership, and a steadfast commitment to the mission of the United States Navy.

Naming a naval vessel in her honor would be a fitting and overdue tribute. It would recognize not only Rear Admiral Duerk's wartime service and extraordinary professional accomplishments, but also the path she forged for future generations of women who answered the call to serve. Her story is one of patriotism, courage, compassion, and quiet strength. It reminds us that the greatness of our Armed Forces has always depended on Americans whose contributions were not always fully recognized in their own time, but whose legacy endures.

Thank you, Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith, for the opportunity to speak today to your committee about these important issues. I look forward to working with you and your staff to develop these proposals and move them across the finish line.