

Prepared Remarks for Congresswoman Julia Letlow (LA-05)
Ways and Means Committee Member Day Hearing: Panel #3
Thursday, September 14, 2023, from 10:50-11:20 a.m. in 1100 Longworth

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for providing the opportunity for me to share priorities that are in the jurisdiction of this Committee.

I am here on behalf of so many public servants such as police officers, firefighters, educators, and other public sector workers who are penalized by the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset, also known as WEP and GPO. These provisions hurt nearly 2.5 million Americans, including 49,000 alone in my home state of Louisiana, by unfairly reducing or eliminating their social security benefits.

In January of this year, I became an original cosponsor of the bipartisan, H.R. 82, the Social Security Fairness Act of 2023, led by Representatives Garret Graves and Abigail Spanberger. This bill aims to eliminate the WEP and GPO, and since reintroduction, it has gained 289 cosponsors, both Democrats and Republicans.

Over the last two years, I have traveled across the Fifth District of Louisiana, listening to stories from my constituents, I can tell you today, this remains a top concern from hardworking Louisianans who have been unjustly penalized.

I received a letter from Carla Moreau, a teacher from Bunkie, Louisiana, who retired after spending 23 years as a public servant in the classroom.

Two years ago, Carla lost her husband Gerard to cancer at age 60. However, due to WEP and GPO, she is ineligible to receive her husband's Social Security survivor benefits, simply because she was a teacher. If Carla had chosen any other profession outside of public service, she would automatically receive those benefits.

Carla's story is just one of many from across my district and our country, and each one is heartbreaking. Not a single day goes by that I don't hear from a constituent who is impacted.

WEP/GPO provisions impact our public servants, the teachers who educate our children and the firefighters and police officers who keep our communities safe. This not only impacts those who are retired but is a disincentive for so many who would enter these fields at a time when our country faces teacher and law enforcement shortages.

Often, our public servants are not aware of these arcane provisions and are blindsided by the reductions when they retire. I've heard of constituents that must work part time jobs to help cover living costs because of WEP/GPO.

While WEP/GPO doesn't impact all states, we still should do the right thing for over 2.5 million Americans and address the problem. Honest Americans who have worked their whole lives by serving and keeping our communities safe should be able to retire with their full Social Security benefits.

I understand that this problem wasn't created by us since it started in the 1980's, but it's incumbent upon us to fix it. These are real people losing their earned benefits that they paid into.

I believe it is time to repeal this injustice, and I will continue to work on educating our colleagues about the importance of righting this wrong. I'm pleading with the Committee and asking for your help to address WEP/GPO. It is my hope the Committee can favorably reporting H.R. 82 and Leadership can bring it to the House Floor for a vote.

Mr. Chairman, I'd also like to take this opportunity to express my strong support for H.R. 531, the Educational Choice for Children Act, led by Representatives Adrian Smith and Burgess Owens.

Earlier this year, I introduced, and the House passed, H.R. 5- the Parents Bill of Rights, which focuses on transparency for America's parents.

The Educational Choice for Children Act is the next step in educational reform and will expand school choice because it gives parents the power to choose an alternative school that can better meet their own child's educational needs.

A one size fits all education doesn't work for all students, especially when it comes to the needs of rural America. Many kids may thrive in a different learning environment, such as a school with smaller class sizes or a school that focuses on a specific style of learning. Families shouldn't miss out on a better educational option that others are able to access.

In higher education, we attach money to the student- why are we not using that same principle for elementary education?

I believe that H.R. 531, creates a similar principle for our K-12 schools and fulfills House Republicans' *Commitment to America*. This bill creates a tax credit which will help expand school choice options for low and moderate income families.

Tax credit scholarships are a proven model and are operating successfully in 21 states, including in my home state of Louisiana. Last year, our state program had over 2,500 participating students with an average scholarship value of 4,255 dollars.

I firmly believe education is the answer to set up our children for future success. I support options that allow parents to have control over what school best meets the needs of their family, I support school choice, and I support H.R. 531.

I hope the Committee will take up H.R. 82, the Social Security Fairness Act of 2023, and H.R. 531, the Educational Choice for Children Act this Congress.

Thank you again for convening this hearing. I yield back.