

CONGRESSWOMAN MARCY KAPTUR

HASC Members Day Testimony

April 11, 2024

REP. KAPTUR: “Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your Committee today and I look forward to working with you on these proposals. As a Member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, I am grateful for our Committees’ partnership in ensuring the selfless members of our armed forces have the tools they need to defend our country against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and that they are afforded the benefits earned through their faithful service when they return home.

I wish to again address an issue for which I seek inclusion as your Committee develops the 2025 Defense Authorizing bill – namely, to strike a new Service Medal entitled the “Last Servicemember Standing.” I seek your Committee’s authorization for the Department of Defense to

design, establish, and implement mechanisms to facilitate the issuance of a new service medal that recognizes the exceptional bravery and valor of the “Last Servicemember Standing.” For too many of America’s most valorous servicemembers never receive the recognition their sacrifices deserve.

Service medals are a timeless means by which the American people recognize acts of valor that our servicemembers engage in on behalf of our nation. However, currently the Department of Defense requires that valor or heroism award recommendations include statements from eyewitnesses. This completely excludes our warriors who find themselves as the last surviving members of their unit in battle against our nation’s foes. For these exceptional heroes, the existing regulation simply makes no sense.

To address this gap in recognition of our nation’s servicemembers, Rep. Judge Carter and I introduced H.R. 6406, the Last Servicemember Standing Medal Act in November of 2023. This legislation would enable

servicemembers who, as result of combat, were the last surviving member of their unit and demonstrated extraordinary heroism in defense of the United States to be eligible for recognition through the Last Servicemember Standing medal. I truly appreciate your Committee's inclusion of the requirement in last year's NDAA for the Department of Defense to provide a briefing on existing awards and decorations for servicemembers who were the last surviving members of their unit. I look forward to receiving that information to inform the Committee's authorization of the Last Servicemember Standing medal in the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act.

In furtherance of this objective, I have the privilege of sharing Sergeant John Eade's story with your Committee. His story serves as an example of the situation that would warrant the medal I am proposing. Sergeant Eade of Toledo, Ohio served with the Army's Second Battalion, Seventh Cavalry Regiment during the Vietnam War. In November 1965, he and his platoon engaged in fierce combat over two days with the People's Army of Vietnam at landing zone Albany. His meticulous notes

illustrate how at just 21 years old, he as sergeant of his unit led his fire team in ferocious hand to hand combat against numerically superior forces. He sustained lifelong disabling injuries, including grenade and shrapnel wounds to his leg that rendered walking nearly impossible, and bullet wounds to his shoulder, abdomen, and face that resulted in the loss of his eye along with nose impairment. Despite his burns across his entire body and other grievous wounds, Sergeant Eade continued fighting and held his unit's position. Tragically, by the end of the battle, Sergeant Eade was the sole surviving member of his platoon. Left for dead, he was discovered and rescued by US forces days later.

As a result of his unwavering courage and dedication, Sergeant Eade was awarded two Purple Hearts and Bronze Star. Despite the heroic nature of his actions, due to the lack of any living witnesses he was not eligible for a higher level medal. He passed away in 2022 after a lifetime of service, overcoming the challenges posed by his injuries to become chief inspector for the city of Boston.

Separately, I will also take a moment to draw your attention to the importance of military youth programs for the development of key workforces our military depends on and for the recruitment of well-prepared new servicemembers. Starbase is one such example of defense-sponsored educational programs that exposes middle schoolers to STEM coursework enabling them to observe its real-world applications. I strongly support these programs for their contributions to education and workforce development. I encourage the Members of this Committee to explore ways in which we can expand these efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your Committee today about issues that impact our nation's servicemembers. I look forward to working with you and your staff to incorporate this proposal and enable well-deserved recognition for our nation's finest men and women.