

## **Statement for the Record**

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Surviving Spouse of CWO3 Donovan Lee “Bull” Briley

For the Legislative Hearing of the  
House Committee on Veterans Affairs

December 3, 2025

Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act, legislation that will finally bring meaningful increases to benefits for survivors and catastrophically disabled veterans.

My name is Sharri Briley, and I am the proud surviving spouse of Chief Warrant Officer Three Donovan Lee “Bull” Briley, an Army Special Operations Blackhawk helicopter pilot.

My husband Donovan had always been larger than life. We met at a blood donation drive at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. On one of our earliest dates, he invited me to a community event at his junior high school. Mid-conversation, I looked up to see him sprinting headfirst down the side of the building, performing an Australian rappel with the kind of fearless energy that came to define him. At that moment, I remember thinking, “Who *is* this guy?”

From then on, he never ceased to surprise me, sweeping me off my feet and taking my breath away. It wasn’t long before his bold spirit drew me into a love story I would never forget. We married just ten months after we began dating, and this December 28th would have marked our 42nd wedding anniversary.

Donovan was a born aviator—brave, daring, and deeply devoted to his family. We were blessed to welcome our daughter, Jordan, five years into our marriage. From an early age, she adapted her world around her father’s flight schedule: sleeping in late so she could stay up at night to sing with him when he returned from missions. We would lie in bed together, singing old hymns and patriotic songs until she knew every word by heart. Donovan, who grew up singing in church, would often croon Elvis to me, and I would melt like butter every time. He made it a point to always fill our home with music, laughter, and love.

He read to Jordan with theatrical flair, igniting her love of learning. He taught her to climb trees before she turned two, to ride her bike, and even pulled her first tooth. One Christmas, he jingled bells outside her window so she would believe Santa was arriving. It is these small, cherished moments that defined him far more than any medal ever could.

On October 3, 1993, my husband was killed in Mogadishu, Somalia, while flying a mission in support of American ground forces during Operation Gothic Serpent. His Blackhawk helicopter was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade. Donovan's actions, and those of his comrades, were later memorialized in the book and movie *Black Hawk Down*. But for me and our daughter, Jordan, who was just five years old at the time, Donovan's sacrifice has never been a story on a screen. It has been our lived reality every day for thirty-two years.

For his courage, Donovan was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, later upgraded to the Silver Star following years of advocacy from myself and his fellow soldiers. He also received the Purple Heart and two Air Medals. Yet no medal can replace the empty chair at birthdays, graduations, and family milestones. No decoration can fill the silence left by his absence. The families of America's fallen live with this reality for the rest of our lives.

After Donovan's death, I made it my mission to ensure that families like mine are never forgotten, that the nation that asked our loved ones to serve also keeps its promise to care for those left behind. I have worked with organizations like Hearts of Our Heroes and, as a proud member of Gold Star Spouses of America, I continue to advocate for the survivors who too often feel invisible in the aftermath of war.

This legislation is deeply personal to me, because it acknowledges that survivors deserve more than words of sympathy; we deserve tangible support. For surviving spouses, the bill increases Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) by 1% each year for five years, in addition to the annual cost-of-living adjustment. Today, roughly half a million survivors receive DIC, which currently amounts to about \$1,653 per month.

Survivors have not received a real increase in over 30 years. During that time, the cost of food, housing, childcare, and medical care has grown dramatically. A modest but meaningful DIC increase will help surviving spouses put food on the table, cover rent, and provide stability for their children. It will send a clear message that our government recognizes the ongoing sacrifice made by surviving families.

The bill also strengthens support for catastrophically disabled veterans and their caregivers. Families like that of Sergeant Eric Edmundson, who sustained devastating injuries in Iraq and now requires daily, round-the-clock care, represent the enduring

costs of war. His wife and parents provide that care out of love, but the financial and emotional burden is immense. This bill provides over \$10,000 more each year in Special Monthly Compensation for these families. That increase will not erase their hardships, but it will give them greater resources to continue providing the dignity, independence, and quality of life their loved ones deserve.

In total, more than 520,000 survivors, caregivers, and veterans will benefit from this legislation. This is the most significant expansion of survivor and caregiver benefits in decades.

For too long, survivors and catastrophically disabled veterans have waited for Congress to act. This bill answers that call. It represents a long overdue acknowledgment that families like mine, and like the Edmundsons, should not have to worry whether they can make ends meet while carrying the invisible burdens of service and sacrifice.

As we marked the thirty-second anniversary of Donovan's death this October, I reflected on his courage, his love for his family, and his devotion to his country. I cannot change that he did not come home. But you, the Members of this Committee, can change the future for the families who walk in my shoes today and for generations to come.

When I think about Donovan — singing Elvis in our living room, reading stories to Jordan, jingling Santa's bells — I'm reminded that behind every legislative and policy debate are real families, real love, and real sacrifices.

I urge you to pass the Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act, and in doing so, deliver on the sacred promise that our nation makes to its heroes and the loved ones they leave behind.

Thank you for your consideration.