

Statement of Rep. Michael Waltz on HR 854,  
*The Captain James C. Edge Gold Star Spouse Equity Act*

Thank you Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano for providing me this opportunity to speak on HR 854, the *Captain James C. Edge Gold Star Spouse Equity Act*, which I introduced with my colleagues, Representatives Seth Moulton, Don Bacon, and Jason Crow.

The legislation is named in memory of Marine Captain James Edge, a classmate of mine at the Virginia Military Institute who was killed on April 14, 2005, from enemy small-arms fire while conducting combat operations in Ramadi, Iraq.

But more importantly, this legislation is for the survivors of our fallen heroes, like James's widow Krissy, and his daughters Helena and Rachel. While nothing we do can ever fill the loss of their loved one, this bill is designed to help ease the transition to the next chapter of their lives.

As the Committee is aware, the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) is a death benefit provided by the Department of Defense. A survivor of a servicemember who died on active duty is paid a benefit equal to 55% of their retirement pay if they had been retired at 100% disability at the time of death. The amount of pay is dependent on the pay grade at the time of the servicemember's death.

The Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), which is under this Committee's jurisdiction, is a VA benefit paid to eligible survivors of active-duty service members and survivors of veterans whose deaths are determined to be service-related. It is a flat monthly payment, currently at \$1,562.74.

These benefits are payable for life to the spouse unless they remarry. If they remarry, they lose these benefits. These benefits are reinstated should that marriage end by death or divorce. However, if that remarriage occurs at the age of 55 or older, the benefits continue uninterrupted.

Up until 2020, the DIC benefit was cutoff if a surviving spouse remarried prior to turning 57 and I'd like to thank then-Chairman Takano and then-Ranking Member Phil Roe, and this committee for helping ease this burden.

However, the time has come to completely eliminate the remarriage penalty and that's what the bill before the Committee does. HR 854 would allow Gold Star spouses to move forward with their lives, allowing them to remarry, free of fear of losing their benefits owed to them for their family's noble sacrifice.

As a Green Beret combat veteran, this is not only personal to me, but a strategic issue for our volunteer military. If the family support structure starts cracking, the entire foundation of our modern military is in trouble.

I humbly ask the Committee to favorably report this legislation. Thank you.