

STATEMENT FOR
THE RECORD BY
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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE APPROVING AGENCIES
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Introduction

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Herseth and members of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, I am pleased to appear before you today on behalf of the National Association of State Approving Agencies to provide comments H.R. 717, H.R. 745 and H.R. 1207. I should mention at the outset that I also am the Vice Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Association and have had the pleasure of working with the members and the staff of the Committee for many years as the Committee has worked to improve the various "GI Bills".

Remarks

The Association is pleased to support the provisions that are presented in the three bills. In general, much has been done in recent years to provide service members, veterans and other eligible persons with greater opportunities to use the education and training benefits to which they are entitled. Yet, the nature of the today's global economy demands that we continue to strive to help our workforce - especially our veterans - to gain new knowledge and learn new skills in order to maximize their contributions to the Nation. The provisions of H.R. 717, H.R. 745 and H.R. 1207 provide either directly or indirectly for these kinds of new learning opportunities.

H.R. 717 expands the accelerated payments provision of law to allow veterans to obtain the kind of financial support necessary for enrollment in commercial driver license training programs. Nationally, truck driving programs are relatively expensive because of the complexities of the today's equipment and the demands of new licensing requirements for specialized loads. Program cost can reach as high as \$6,000 or \$7,000 for 12 weeks of instruction. An opportunity to use the accelerated payment provision of law would allow more veterans to pursue their chosen occupation.

The Association supports H.R. 717 section 2. Exclusion of benefit payments under the Montgomery GI Bill from income for eligibility determinations for federal education loans.

GI Bill benefits are intended to be an entitlement to which all who serve in the Armed Forces of our Nation are eligible. Moreover, it has always been the intent of Congress that the GI Bill be the premier program in our Nation to help our citizens to further their education and training. Inclusion of GI Bill benefits in any formula for determining eligibility for other federal educational assistance is not consistent with these goals nor the sacrifices made by those who protect the freedoms that we all so thoroughly enjoy.

H.R. 745 provides for the creation of a pilot program for veterans to use their VA educational assistance benefits for training associated with the ownership of a franchise. We support this proposal based on the fact that it would expand the number of opportunities for veterans to obtain gainful employment in a field of their choosing. The risks associated with this pilot would be few since the “rules” pertaining to the approval of the programs are almost identical to those currently required for other non-accredited, non-degree programs of education and training. Additionally, most state laws would (as they do now) require a review of the organization offering the training for state licensing purposes, thus, there is little to no risk of “fly by night” training.

H.R. 1207 provides a much needed expansion of the kinds of services in which VA work-study students may be engaged. The first part of the bill allows VA students to assist veterans and their spouses as they work to achieve their education, training and employment goals. In our view, this is an excellent use of VA work-study funds. The second part of the bill is a pilot program that expands the kinds of work in which VA students can be involved while they are enrolled at an educational institution. We believe that this expansion is appropriate as the cost of higher education escalates at a much faster pace than VA educational assistance benefits because of budgetary constraints. The pilot program also has sufficient limitations to ensure that it will not be abused by an overly ambitious postsecondary educational institution with an eye on cutting its overhead costs and increasing its profit margin.

Closing

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the three bills. Thank you also for your efforts to make improvements to the education and training assistance programs that have been made available to those who defend the freedoms that we all so thoroughly enjoy. As stated earlier, we support the provisions of the bills and at this time, I would be happy to respond to any questions that you might have.