

STATEMENT

BY

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On behalf of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities in cooperation with other national higher education associations that participate in the Partnership for Veterans Education.

on

The Montgomery GI Bill for Members of the
Selected Reserve

Before the

MILITARY PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE

House Armed Services Committee

And the

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY SUBCOMMITTEE

House Veterans' Affairs Committee

September 27, 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In addition to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, **all of the major national higher education associations are members of the Partnership for Veterans Education.** They **support the Total Force GI Bill concept**, which is aimed at clear and fair GI Bill benefits for reserve forces.

The **GI Bill has not kept pace with national military strategy and force deployment policies.** The **American Way of War has changed, but our responsibility to veterans has not.** We must fix the legislation where **our military strategy and practices are out of sync with the nation's debt to veterans.**

There is a **lingering perception of second-class treatment of the guard and reserve forces** that have borne a large part of the recent combat burden. The incremental **manner in which Chapters 30, 1606, and 1607 have evolved has led to inequities in educational benefits.** There is confusion among veterans and administrators. New, comprehensive legislation is needed.

Our servicemembers are a very special part of an adult education revolution that is sweeping the country. Contemporary **Adult and Continuing Education and the concept of lifelong learning apply to all members of the Total Force structure.**

- There are **social and economic implications that far outweigh the bureaucratic and funding priorities of military managers.**

- Access to GI Bill benefits, provisions for accelerated payments, high-tech programs, delimiting dates, etc. need a comprehensive new look.

The **administration** of the current patchwork of laws **is inflexible, needlessly cumbersome and inefficient:**

- GI Bill funding and administration belong in the Department of Veteran Affairs where veterans are the first priority.

- An outdated administrative culture could be addressed by reform that could accompany a new approach to the GI Bill.

Conclusions:

The **GI Bill has gotten out of sync with the nation's strategy, its force deployment policies, and its debt to veterans. Veterans of the Selected Reserve suffer the most from this.**

An effective Total Force GI Bill would provide **benefits that reflect actual service to the country and not merely the category or designation of the servicemember based on some outmoded "class" distinction between types of service.**

It is time for one unified GI Bill, administered and funded by one Cabinet Department, to replace the patchwork that now exists. **There is an historic opportunity at hand to produce a new "Total Force" GI Bill that can be seen by all to be clear, fair, well administered, and in synchronization**

with national strategy, force deployment policies, and contemporary educational needs of veterans.

I am here today as an educator and a veteran. I speak on behalf of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities in cooperation with other national higher education associations that participate in the Partnership for Veterans Education. AASCU and all other major national higher education associations have supported Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges in its advocacy of education for servicemembers and veterans for a third of a century. As members of The Partnership for Veterans' Education, they have strongly supported improvements to the GI Bill.

The **Partnership for Veterans' Education** includes the American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC), the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the American Council on Education (ACE), the National Association of Independent Colleges and universities (NAICU), the National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA), the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULG), and Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC). All **support the Total Force GI Bill concept.**

Improvements have been made in Chapter 30 GI Bill benefits since the Partnership for Veterans' Education began to urge that those benefits should be "benchmarked" to the cost of a four-year college education at an average public college or university. Still, that modest benchmark has not yet been reached: The Chapter 30 benefit after 1 October 2006 will be only at about **75.55% of the benchmark, and this percentage includes only tuition, room, and board. It does not include all actual expenses to**

veterans (books, supplies, commuting, and living costs.) The percentage of four-year resident college costs that the MGIB truly covers when all costs are included is lower by approximately 20 percent. Work still needs to be done to reach the benchmark.

There has been **too little progress in GI Bill benefits for the Guard and Reserve**. Advocates had thought that, as Chapter 30 benefits rose, Guard and Reserve benefits would follow. That has not happened. This **lack of progress comes at a time when the nation's military strategy and force deployment policies have transformed Total Force philosophy into an undisputed reality**. Thousands of Guard and Reserve servicemembers, many of them college students or aspiring students, are serving on active duty without fair access to GI Bill benefits commensurate with their service. The fact is that **the GI Bill has not kept pace with national military strategy and force deployment policies**. The attempt of Chapter 1607 to rectify this is recognized, but confusion and inequities persist that must be addressed.

A fair and effective Total Force GI Bill would provide benefits that reflect actual service to the country and not merely the category or designation of the servicemember based on some outmoded "class" distinction between types of service. An uncomplicated, clearly understandable model has been supported by the Partnership for Veterans' Education. It merits attention, at least as a starting point for serious consideration of reform.

I would like to highlight some entitlement and managerial issues that affect our veteran-students.

1) The **Evolution of various programs (Chapters 30, 1606, and 1607) has led to inequities in educational benefits.** Examples:

- **Reservists called to active duty could receive no educational benefit** if service is at the end of their reserve commitment. **This is both unfair and unwise.** It is time to recognize that **holding the reservist's educational opportunity hostage to the needs of personnel managers is not in the national interest and not in the long-term interest of our ability to wage 21st century warfare.** It is also an **abrogation of the nation's responsibility to the 21st century servicemember.**

- **No readjustment benefit exists** for members of the selective reserve called to active duty. This **in spite of the fact that readjustment** after being called to active duty to go in harm's way for extended periods **is obviously needed.** A **change in the recognized purposes of the GI Bill for these servicemembers is required.**

- The MGIB and MGIB-SR do not pay for the same training. They should.

- Attempts have been made, with mixed results, to adjust the various versions of the active duty GI Bill to contemporary Adult and Continuing Education and the concept of lifelong learning. These **modern trends in higher education apply to all servicemembers in the Total Force**

structure. Veterans are adult students, often with families to support, trying to get an education. Provisions for accelerated payment, high-tech programs, delimiting dates, etc. **need a fresh, comprehensive new look in a single GI Bill** that has appropriate access for all types of servicemembers.

2) There is **confusion among veterans and administrators.**

- Understandable confusion exists concerning the relationship between the kind of service rendered and educational benefit provided by current legislation. Some of this results from bureaucratic inertia in two separate Cabinet Departments. Some is **a reflection of outmoded thinking and unjustified distinctions about types of military service.**

- The three “tiers” in the Total Force GI Bill concept clearly and fairly provide educational benefits commensurate with kind of military service rendered.

3) **The administration of the current patchwork of laws is inflexible, needlessly cumbersome and inefficient. An outdated administrative culture could be addressed by reform that could accompany a new approach to the GI Bill.**

- **Government structure has changed since the original GI Bill:** there are now two Cabinet-level Departments. Strategy, war fighting and maintenance of a combat-ready force rightly occupy the Department of

Defense. **GI Bill funding and administration belong, under Title 38 in the Department of Veteran Affairs where veterans are the first priority.**

- An **outdated administrative culture dominates GI Bill management.** This results in low morale among veterans and high administrative costs that probably exceed the dollar costs of their benefit.

- Waste, fraud and abuse a half century ago still motivates the bureaucracy. Modern abuses should be dealt with by modern means. “Management by Exception,” a familiar basic management concept, is the opposite of GI Bill management. **Every institution and every veteran is treated like a potential lawbreaker. A new attitude is needed.**

- Backlogs result from **requiring an inordinate amount of information** before a veteran can draw funds from what should be considered his GI Bill “account.”

- **Modern techniques of accounting and administration,** commonplace at American Express and Wal Mart, could usefully inform current administrative and legal culture. Electronic signatures, debit card account maintenance, and rapid, straightforward verification techniques for transactions may not all fit the problems of managing a veteran’s “account,” but it is difficult to believe that they would not help.

- **Education Services does not enjoy high priority in DVA** where other veterans’ benefits, particularly health benefits, involve more funds and much higher political sensitivity. It **is extremely difficult to reform,** or even much improve, the administration of GI Bill benefits **if funding** for modern needs such as state-of-the-art computer expertise and equipment **is low priority.** Perhaps the single most important material element

needed to bring the administration of the GI Bill into the 21st century is high-tech expertise and equipment.

- **Support of veteran administrators at academic institutions is weak.** Veterans benefit from the strongest possible counseling and administrative structure at the academic institution level. The fee that is paid for veteran certifications (\$7) has not been updated since the 1970s. Veteran administrators on campuses are partners and, with stronger support, can improve the veteran's educational experience as well as the administration of the GI Bill.

Summary:

The GI Bill has gotten out of sync with the nation's strategy, its force deployment policies, and its debt to veterans. Veterans of the Selected Reserve suffer the most from this.

The **current management** of the GI Bill **needs comprehensive, ongoing reform.** Consolidation and clarification of current laws could serve as a basis for management reform and simplification. The **proposed Total Force GI Bill is a rare management opportunity to reform and integrate the GI Bill to render better, fairer educational benefits** for those who have served their country.

It is **time for one unified GI Bill**, administered and funded by one Cabinet Department, to replace the patchwork that now exists. There is **an historic opportunity at hand to produce a new "Total Force" GI Bill that can be**

seen by all to be clear, fair, well administered, and in synchronization with national strategy and force deployment policies.