

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF VETERANS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

2020 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 1975

Washington, D. C. 20006-1846

TESTIMONY

OF

**DAVID A. GUZMAN**  
NAVPA  
LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

AND

**FAITH A. DESLAURIERS**  
NAVPA  
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE CHAIR

BEFORE THE HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

on

OVERSIGHT HEARINGS ON TRANSITION ASSISTANCE FOR  
MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD AND EDUCATIONAL  
BENEFITS FOR THE TOTAL MILITARY FORCE

Rogers, Arkansas

MARCH 22, 2002

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Good Morning Mr. Chairman, members of the House Sub-Committee on Economic Opportunity, House Veterans Affairs Committee. I am David Guzman; Legislative Director of the National Association of Veterans Program Administrators and with me is Faith DesLauriers, the NAVPA Legislative Committee Chair. We have been asked to provide testimony concerning the flexibility of the current title 38, U.S.C. and Title 10, U.S.C, as relates to education programs as well as related administrative processes. Thank you for this opportunity.

While both Title 38 and Title 10 U.S.C. as relates to the Montgomery GI Bill are admirable programs that have allowed service members a readjustment or employment needs education and training plan, these excellent programs, as envisioned by US Representative G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery, have not had the benefit of being updated to meet today's technological advancements or the involvement of the total force military. Many of the statutory and administrative requirements are applied in such a manner as to be restrictive and, in some cases, deny educational and training benefits to eligible veterans. The NAVPA Legislative Agenda for 2006 outlines many of these barriers. We know that efficiencies can be gained in a win-win-win scenario (VA-School-Veteran) and we have made such recommendations in our agenda, which was distributed to the sub-committee on February 1, 2006. While the VA has been open too many of our suggestions the continual turnover of the Director of Education Services has impaired progress. Past directors have indicated that our recommendations are sound but they leave before any actions are taken; progress is stopped and in fact we find ourselves starting over after a new director is named and after he or she becomes familiar on the technologies employed and is comfortable in the new position. Some of these recommendations include: staffing VA education services for TAPS briefings like the VA C&P program, VA Education employees can counsel more appropriately on education issues; Make processing rules the same for all benefits. Treat reductions, terminations, entitlement extensions, remedial hours, and any other payment issues the same for all benefits. Considering that a claims examiner handles many different types of claims, the more variation in the rules between benefits complicates processing and slows down service to veterans; if the claimant is eligible for a higher rate the VA should pay the higher benefit and notify the claimant of such action. Currently, Public Law 108-375 requires the VA to obtain an election if the claimant is eligible for Chapter 1607 and another benefit; eliminate the need to develop for mitigating circumstances for reductions and terminations under all education benefits.

Make the change effective the date it occurs regardless of when in the term it happens as most schools require a specific “standard of progress”, if the students are not meeting the school’s specified standard of progress the school would not allow them to continue to enroll and the VA certifying official will terminate for cause; on electronic applications accept electronic signatures, and develop a web portal for veterans to view their records specifically on notification of receipt of their application, determination of eligibility, and other electronic notifications the now tend to bog down processes or tie up phone inquiries.

NAVPA has long held that the GI Bill is an earned benefit, as well as an investment, that should not have a 10 year delimiting date but that the delimiting date should be extended to 15 or 20 years to better address the needs of life-long learning. Many veterans cannot use the benefits immediately following service to our country because of family commitments; when they finally are able to attend college the benefit has expired because of the 10 year delimiting rule, a real disservice to those who served honorably and truly need assistance. Most veterans accessing the MGIB use the 36 months of eligibility within their first college degree program; however, there are many others who need the benefit to pay for high cost short term programs; for on the job training and apprenticeships, or to upgrade skills in their profession.

There are 12 VA education programs now, too many for the VA and schools to manage at acceptable levels. The eligibility requirements for these programs are confusing to the VA let alone for the school certifying official. Remember that those school program administrators are at the business end of the GI Bill. If the schools cannot help a veteran because of confusing criteria you can imagine the frustration of the veteran seeking help. This is where the Total Force GI Bill concept comes in -- a fresh and new approach to an education program and equitably rewarding our veterans for their service to our country, one clean bill to replace and update the MGIB.

A new total force approach could only enhance the support and services provided to our service members and veterans from all branches of service. The total force concept includes active, National Guard and Reserve forces. Post-service benefits should be developed to ensure that they are commensurate with the type and length of service as well as the risk exposure from mobilization/deployment addressed in the total force concept paper.

This updated bill should consider the elimination of allowing the federal financial aid formula from eroding the value of the MGIB; it should embrace the concept of life-long learning by allowing veterans to use their GI Bill when needed to earn a degree, certificate or to upgrade job skills. Veterans should be allowed to work in academic departments on the campus in which they are pursuing their degree program to gain valuable work experience for life after college under the veterans’ work-study program.

Administratively, claims processing needs to be made more efficient through consolidation of the four VA regional processing centers to one– claims are submitted to the VA in electronic format – staff savings in consolidation could be put to more urgent needs within DVA – one stop processing of claims means one consistent answer to veterans and school certifying officials. An on-line, secure, web portal, similar to your bank, school, airline, etc., would make for an efficient method of sharing information with school certifying officials as well as to the client, the veteran; this is not new technology – can you imagine the reduction in phone calls.

Administrative details such as reporting data in the school certification to VA that are subject to annual audit should not be necessary as too many claims are held in abeyance pending receipt of information that does not affect the status of the claim for education benefits such as reporting prior credit and/or change of program. Tie military separation physicals to VA compensation physicals to ensure that separating veterans are not delayed in receiving benefits due to not having a VA compensation physical. Often delays are caused by veterans having to complete a compensation physical after separation – the physical can take 6 months to over 2 years depending on the location of the veteran and the work load of the VA in that state/area.

Finally, we ask Congress to authorize a Veterans Service, Education and Training Program grant (VSET) to be used by school veteran program administrators to enhance services to student veterans, outreach to non student veterans in the local community and for training of school certifying officials. DVA compensation for schools to develop enrollment verifications for the VA is totally inadequate and has not been updated or increased since early 1970.

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**DAVID A. GUZMAN**

Mr. David A. Guzman is the Legislative Director for the National Association of Veterans Program Administrators (NAVPA). He served for 15 years in the higher education community and retired from Washington State University in Pullman, Washington as University Registrar.

He has served on numerous national, state and local veterans' advisory councils and committees. He recently served on the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Education (2002 – 2005) and is a past chair of the Washington State Governor's Veterans Affairs Advisory Council. He is a member of the Air Force Association Veterans and Retiree Council.

Mr. Guzman is a veteran of 30 years service with the US Air Force. He retired as the Command Chief, Senior Enlisted Advisor the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Air Forces, Hickam AFB, Hawaii. Additionally, his assignments included duty as Senior Enlisted Advisor to the commander, United States Logistics Group, Ankara, Turkey, Personnel Sergeant Major, Sembach AB, Germany, Personnel Sergeant Major, 5<sup>th</sup> Allied Tactical Air Force (NATO), Vicenza, Italy, Chief, Test Control Branch, USAF Military Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, TX, Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Commander, Space Division, Los Angeles AFS, CA. His military decorations include the Legion of Merit, the Meritorious Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters, the Air Force Commendation Medal with one oak leaf cluster, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (Southeast Asia) and the Vietnam Service Medal with three bronze stars.

Mr. Guzman holds a Masters of Education from the University of Idaho (1990), a Bachelors of Arts in Management from the University of Phoenix (1988) and an AAS in Resource Management from the Community College of the Air Force (1983). His post graduate work is in Student Services from Washington State University.

He is married to Cathy Ann (Taggart) from Potlatch, Idaho. The Guzman's have two adopted children, David Carlos age 15 and Maria Angela age 14.

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**Faith Ann DesLauriers**

faith.deslauriers@erau.edu

Ms. Faith DesLauriers is the University Director of Veterans Affairs for Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University where she is responsible for managing all operations and activities pertaining to the administration of veterans' programs and services. Embry-Riddle, the world's largest, fully accredited university specializing in aviation and aerospace, meets the needs of students and industry through its educational, training, research, and consulting activities. Embry-Riddle educates more than 25,000 students annually through the master's level at residential campuses in Daytona Beach, Fla., and Prescott, Ariz., at more than 130 teaching centers in the United States and Europe, and through distance learning.

She has a 25-year background in the administration of Veterans education programs and is proficient in interpreting and applying Title 38, United States Code of Federal regulations, Chapter 30, 32, 35, and 36, and Chapter 106 of Title 10, USC, States' laws, and VA policies and procedures. Her professional experience includes: Acquires and maintains State and Federal DVA approvals for veteran training at all Embry-Riddle locations. Coordinates the delivery of programs and services to veterans, service persons, reservists and other eligible persons at all ERAU locations. Serve as the primary technical resource for current and changing DVA rules and regulations, assessing the impact and advising the University of the effect on students attending ERAU. Maintains institutional compliance with federal, state and institutional regulations with regard to the administration of veterans education programs. Interpret federal regulations and various states' laws as they apply at each university facility and develop policies and procedures unique to each entity of the university for the delivery of veterans education programs.

Ms. DesLauriers provides training programs, supervision and guidance to approximately 200 Embry Riddle VA Certifying Officials located within 32 states. She is responsible for all regulatory and compliance issues pertaining to the administration of Veteran's Education Programs to over 4,500 Veterans and Servicepersons.

**National:**

National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators (NAVPA)

Oct. 2005 – Present	Legislative Committee Chair
Oct. 2004 – Oct. 2005	Senior Advisor and Legislative Committee Chair (At-Large Representative)
Oct. 2002 – Oct. 2004	President (At-Large Representative)
2000 – 2002	Vice President – Legislative Chair
1999 – 2000	Senior Advisor - Education Committee Chair
1996 - 1999	President (At Large Representative)
1994-1996	Vice-President (Legislative Chair)
1992-1994	Public Relations Chair and News Letter Editor

*Member of the Board of Directors, serving Region IV since 1989*

Department of Veterans Affairs – Education Service

Present Appointment	Secretary of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Education
2002 – 2003	Education Service eCERT Project Team
2000- 2001	Education Business Process Reengineering Committee Electronic Approval Project Team Co-leader Information Technology Team Member Training Activities Project Team Leader
1993-1994	Committee for Policy & Standards

**Other**

2003 - Present	Embry-Riddle University Administration Assessment Committee
2001 – 2003	Embry Riddle Student Retention Task Force
2000	Provided testimony to US House of Representatives on MGIB
Enhancements	
1999	Embry-Riddle Customer Service Program Leader
1989 –1990	Florida State Postsecondary Review Entity

**Awards/Honors/Other Accomplishments:**

2003 NAVPA Ron York Meritorious Service Award (Leadership and Significant Contributions)  
2001 NAVPA Distinguished Service Award (Outstanding Leadership and Contributions)  
1999-2000 Strathmore's Who's Who (Professional Leadership and Achievement)  
1999 NAVPA Presidents Award (Outstanding contributions and Support to the President)  
1996 NAVPA Presidents Award (Outstanding contributions and Support to the President)  
1992 NAVPA Service Award (Dedicated service to Veterans Programs & to NAVPA)

- Collaborated on the planning, promotion and production of the NAVPA InfoPak (CD-ROM), to develop and index a collection of documents, full-text search index and several specialized search indices with 11,035 pages of rules, regulations, references, and resources relating to education programs for veterans and active duty personnel, Reservists, and National Guard.
- Developed and delivered group presentations at national, regional and local conferences for new and experienced veteran program administrators
- Developed the NAVPA Handbook for Certifying Officials, which is used for used for national training programs conducted on an annual basis.

**Regional:**

- Serves as a member of the Southern Region Education Committee for Veterans. Appointed by the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office as Florida's representative for the Southern Region. The committee was formed to enhance two-way communication between schools and the Atlanta Regional Processing Office, Identify areas of concern and seek ways to improve service delivery and promote efficiency.

**State:**

- Developed and delivered a training program which served as a model for current and future workshops for certifying Officials to enhance their professional knowledge. Serve as an advisor for this program, which is administered, by the FL Department of Veterans Affairs and the State Approving Agency for Veteran Training.
- Represents over 400 schools and colleges in Florida at VA regional meetings addressing veterans' education issues.
- Embry-Riddle University Veterans Affairs Office was cited by the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs as having one of best programs in the state of Florida. In addition to the highly efficient VA paperwork, this office has an active counseling program for veterans to maximize their educational opportunities and ultimately their earning power.

**Personal:**

Born in Jamestown, NY. Moved to Florida in 1961. Currently resides in Daytona Beach Florida with husband Richard (Digger). Faith has one son, James Joseph, one grandson (Joseph) and four granddaughters (Hailey, Hannah, Nicole and Madison). Hobbies: Motorcycles (Harley Davidson)

