

STATEMENT

BY

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BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In addition to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, **all other major national higher education associations are members of the Partnership for Veterans Education. They support the Total Force GI Bill concept.**

There has been little progress in GI Bill benefits for the Guard and Reserve. **The GI Bill has not kept pace with national military strategy and force deployment policies.**

The Evolution of **Chapters 30, 1606, and 1607 has led to inequities in educational benefits.** There is confusion among veterans and administrators.

Contemporary **Adult and Continuing Education and the concept of lifelong learning apply to the entire Total Force** structure. 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:**

- All GI Bill funding and administration belong in the Department of Veteran Affairs where veterans are the first priority.
- An outdated administrative culture dominates GI Bill management. Veterans are micromanaged – the **consequences of this management** style are **high administrative costs and low morale** for Veterans. “Management by Exception,” a familiar 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.
- **Modern techniques of accounting and administration seem foreign** in DVA administrative and legal culture.
- **Backlogs result from requiring an inordinate amount of information** before a veteran can draw funds from what should be considered his GI Bill “account.”
- **Education Services does not enjoy high priority within DVA** Example: it is extremely difficult to reform the administration of GI Bill benefits if funding for state-of-the-art computer expertise and equipment is low priority.
- **Support of veteran administrators at academic institutions is weak**

Summary:

The current **management of the GI Bill needs** comprehensive, ongoing **reform**. 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 and 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.

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.**

First, this Committee should be commended for the improvements that 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. That benchmark has not yet been reached (Chapter 30 benefits are now about 61% of the benchmark: \$9,234 of \$15,154.) Work needs to be done to reach the benchmark, but Congress has made a meaningful attempt to keep pace with college costs for active duty servicemembers.

There has been **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.

Others will address the details of how the Total Force concept would adjust benefits to reflect actual service, so I will not address that here. 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 nothing** if service is at the end of their reserve commitment.

- **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.

- 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:**

- **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**, buttressed by rules and regulations rivaled only by those of the IRS, **dominates GI Bill management.** Veterans are micromanaged with consequences that result in low morale among veterans and high administrative costs that probably exceed the dollar costs of their benefit.

- **History weighs too heavy at DVA.** Waste, fraud and abuse a half century ago still motivates the bureaucracy and haunts the veteran-student. Of course, abuses still exist in modern forms, but they must 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, **seem foreign in DVA** 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 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 Veteran Educational Opportunity Program, funded by the Department of Education, helped support veteran administrators at colleges but was allowed to lapse a decade ago. 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 **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.

STEVE FRANCIS KIME

3/7/06

Abbreviated CV

Education:

- Ph.D. Harvard University, 1971.
- ^a MPA Harvard University, 1968
- B. A. (highest honors) University of Louisville, 1962.
- US Naval Submarine School, 1962-63.
- State Department Foreign Service Institute, Russian Course, 1982-83.
- The National War College, U.S. National Security Policy, Diploma, 1976-77.

Experience:

- Board Member, SREB (Southern Regional Education Board) 2005 - present
- President, Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, 1989-2005.
This organization serves as liaison between DoD, the major national higher education associations, and over 1900 colleges and universities.
- Vice President, American Assoc. of State Colleges & Universities. 2003 -05
- Chair, Educational Assistance Advisory Committee, Department of Veterans Affairs, 1998 - 2004. (Member since 1990)
- Member, Pennsylvania State University Outreach Board, 2006
- United States Naval Attache to the Soviet Union, 1983- 85
 - Assistant U. S. Naval Attaché to the Soviet Union, 1971 – 73
- Director, United States & International Studies Division, United States Naval Academy, 1986-89.
 - Responsible for the Political Science, Economics and Language Studies Departments. Academic rank of Professor.
 - Member: Admissions & Academic Boards of the U. S. Naval Academy.
- The United States Naval Institute, 1986 - 89.
 - Elected Director on the Naval Institute Board of Control
 - Member, Editorial Board of the Naval Institute Proceedings.
- Deputy Director, Navy Politico-Military Policy and Current Plans Division 1985-6.
- The National War College, 1976-82.
 - Director of Soviet Studies, 1976-82.
 - Selected as Navy Professor, 1978.
 - Associate Dean of Faculty, & Director of Elective Studies, 1979-82.
 - Delegation leader to USSR, Yugoslavia, Romania, The Far East

- Estimator and Analyst (Russian and National Security Affairs), 1973-76
- Sea duty: Submariner. Captain, USN (RET)

Required statement on amount and source of any federal grant or contract in the past
two years relevant to this testimony:

Steve F. Kime has, with the exception of salary received from Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, received no funds from federal grants and contracts in the past two years.

s/ Steve F. Kime