



Statement of Christopher Neiweem
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of
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before the
House Armed Services Committee
Subcommittee on Military Personnel
hearing on
**Stakeholder Views of the Military Compensation and
Retirement Modernization Commission**

March 25, 2015

Chairman Heck, Ranking Member Davis, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and our nearly 400,000 members and supporters, thank you for the opportunity to share our views on the final report and recommendations of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC).

We applaud the Commission for putting forth some bold measures that merit serious consideration, however we also look upon its report and recommendations as a mixed bag. Some of what is called for is consistent with recommendations we and other military and veteran service and advocacy groups have long supported, while others raise questions and concerns for IAVA and our members.

First, an area in which we are in strong agreement with the Commission is the need for increased DoD-VA cooperation, up to and including the sharing of systems and information. The process of transitioning from active duty to veteran



status is still disjointed, and OEF/OIF veterans often report gaps in care and assistance when leaving DoD and entering the VA system. While the report cited increased inter-departmental information sharing, it also acknowledged poor oversight and inadequate accountability.

This situation not only negatively impacts the new veterans' health care experience, but it also prolongs the process of applying for disability compensation benefits after separation. Further, it frustrates the VA's ongoing efforts to process disability and compensation claims in a timely manner.

There is no doubt to us that the goal of quality continuous care requires a fully interoperable - preferably joint, but at least fully interoperable - data record, as well as a joint DoD-VA drug formulary, which I know the Committee will be addressing at a later date.

Additionally, we strongly agree with the Commission on the urgent need for increased financial literacy and benefits stewardship education for service members and their families..

We see the need for this not only with countless examples of predatory lending targeting service members, but also for-profit educational institutions laser beam focus on service members and veterans' valuable Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits.

IAVA is interested in taking a deeper dive into the Commission's recommendations regarding alternate retirement plan packages. In a recent survey of our members, 36% of respondents felt the military retirement system should be reformed. Of those respondents, when allowed to select multiple options, 67% favored a 401k-style benefit for non-careerists, 33% favored increasing the overall value of current retirement benefits, and 59% favored a



partial early retirement benefit for 10 or 15 years of service.

Of those IAVA members surveyed, who are by definition combat veterans, there is a belief that it is fundamentally unfair that one could serve for 10 or 12 years with 3, 4, 5 or more deployments and leave the military with absolutely no retirement benefit at all, yet a careerist who never even deployed could be entitled to a full retirement package.

Therefore, IAVA is open to reforms that would amend the current system to allow non-career troops the opportunity to receive some retirement benefits. We will continue to analyze and assess the potential value of the Commission's options while understanding and factoring in the long-term goal of maintaining a ready and relevant 21st century all-volunteer force.

In past testimony, IAVA has voiced its concerns with some of the Commission's recommendations regarding reductions in Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. For example, the Commission recommends increasing the service obligation in order to maintain eligibility to transfer the GI Bill benefit to a spouse or child. Additionally, housing benefits for dependants using the GI bill would expire in 2017 under the Commission's recommendations.

IAVA fought hard for the enactment and expansion of the current Post 9/11 G.I. Bill. This benefit has transformed the educational and employment landscape for a significant population of OEF and OIF veterans, and its value cannot be understated. We will continue to analyze the numerous comprehensive recommendations the Commission has articulated before developing final views. However, fundamental reductions in Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, even for dependents, raises red flags for our members and their families.



Mr. Chairman, IAVA appreciates the opportunity to offer our views on the Commission's recommendations , and we look forward to continuing to work with each of you, your staff, and the Committee to improve the lives of service members, veterans, and their families.