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TESTIMONY OF
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VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON THE TOPIC OF:
"HARRY W. COLMERY VETERANS EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2017"

JULY 17, 2017



Chairman Roe, Ranking Member Walz and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting Student Veterans of America (SVA) to submit our testimony on the modernization of the GI Bill and other pending legislation. With over 1,400 chapters representing the nearly 1.1 million student veterans in schools across the country, we are pleased to share the perspective of those directly impacted by the subjects before this committee.

Established in 2008, SVA has grown to become a force and voice for the interests of veterans in higher education. With a myriad of programs supporting their success, rigorous research on ways to improve the landscape, and advocacy throughout the nation, we place the student veteran at the top of our organizational pyramid. As the future leaders of this country, fostering the success of veterans in school is paramount in their preparation for productive and impactful lives.

We will discuss our unwavering interest in achieving a GI Bill® for all future veterans, along with other policy proposals to expand education access for Purple Heart recipients, Guard and Reserve members, school closure students, and survivors. Since the passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2008, SVA has been working with a coalition of higher education and veteran organizations to improve the GI Bill for generations to come, including discussions that began in 2016 with the veteran community about making the GI Bill permanent. We also strongly support the removal of the arbitrary 15-year time limit on using this earned benefit, a provision that will truly make this program “Forever”.

Our National Veteran Education Success Tracker (NVEST) research demonstrates that the GI Bill has a high return on investment for veterans and the country—a program worth ensuring for all generations to come.¹ As the most recently transitioned generation of veterans, student veterans are ambassadors to the all-volunteer force, and recognize the value of this investment.

SVA and the over 1.1 million student veterans in school today look forward to working with congress and the wider community to make this proposed expansion a reality.

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Sec. 101. Consideration of certain time spent receiving medical care from Secretary of Defense as active duty for purposes of eligibility for Post 9/11 Educational Assistance.

This section proposes amending title 38, United States Code, to consider certain time spent by members of reserve components of the Armed Forces while receiving medical care from the

¹ Cate, C. A., Lyon, J. S., Schmeling, J., & Bogue, B. Y. (2017). National Veteran Education Success Tracker: A report on the academic success of student-veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Washington, D.C.



Secretary of Defense as active duty for purposes of eligibility for Post-9/11 Educational Assistance. The missing code of 12301(h) was a known problem as early as October 2014, documented in an October 1, 2014 Reserve Forces Policy Board memorandum. SVA maintains a hard stance on addressing this issue immediately, and looks forward to seeing a solution passed this year.

Sec. 102. Consolidation of certain eligibility tiers under Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This section proposes to amend title 38, United States Code, to consolidate certain eligibility tiers under the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program. For reservists, the opportunity to serve on active duty and earn GI Bill benefits may be limited for some, while the wider reserve components continue to be an integral component of the overall global Department of Defense posture. This proposal recognizes the importance that National Guard and Reserve Members play in the protection of our nation in service overseas.

The modified tiers of eligibility would provide 10% increases, specifically for those who serve on active duty up to 12 months. The minimum threshold of benefits would be increased up to 50% eligibility for those who serve between three to six months (see table below for reference). Our research indicates that student veterans are quintessentially non-traditional students, which often includes significant financial obligations and costs associated with raising families.²

The increase in education benefits at the lower tiers makes achieving educational success a significantly more attainable goal. The reserves of the U.S. Armed Forces has been greatly tested as our country has been at war for well over a decade. Many of these reservists have the opportunity to apply their education in the service of our nation as they are mobilized for deployments, making this increase a direct impact to the overall national security of the country as well.

Member Service	Percentage of Maximum Benefit	
	Current	Proposed
Service-Connected Disability	100%	100%
36+ months	100%	100%
30 - 36 months	90%	90%
24 - 30 months	80%	80%
18 - 24 months	70%	70%
12- 18 months	60%	60%
6 - 12 months	50%	60% (+10%)
3 - 6 months	40%	50% (+10%)

²Cate, C.A., Davis, T, (2016), Spotlight Brief, <https://studentveterans.org/images/SVASpotlightBrief-1.pdf>



Sec. 103. Educational assistance under Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program for members of the Armed Forces awarded the Purple Heart.

This section would acknowledge the sacrifice of men and women who have served our country with dignity, sustaining battlefield injuries. Currently, only veterans who either served at least 36 months on active duty or are medically retired receive Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits at the 100 percent rate, excluding nearly 3,000 Purple Heart recipients over the next ten years who may not meet these administrative requirements. In practice, this error penalizes men and women who were wounded before they could reach the full term of their contract to receive GI Bill eligibility. SVA believes that those who shed blood in our country's defense should have the opportunity to go to school. For those who have sacrificed their own self in service, we strongly believe those men and women have fully met the service requirement for GI Bill eligibility.

Sec. 104. Eligibility for Post-9/11 Educational Assistance for certain members of reserve components of Armed Forces who lost entitlement to educational assistance under Reserve Educational Assistance Program.

This section would allow members of the National Guard and Reserves who lost benefits under the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) as a result of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2016 to access Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. Individuals who have experienced a loss of earned benefits due to technical oversights have resulted in many student veterans losing access to education. This section would fix this gap for these students, and provide the critical opportunity to return to school, a much-needed fix.

Sec. 105. Calculation of monthly housing stipend under Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program based on location of campus where classes are attended.

This section would adjust the calculation of the monthly housing stipend under Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program based on location of campus where classes are attended. Currently this disparity exists between where a veteran physically attends classes and resides, and the monthly stipend provided under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

For example, a veteran could be enrolled at an online institution of higher learning (IHL) based in San Francisco, while living in a rural district of North Dakota; in such a case, the individual would receive substantially higher Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) than necessary, inflating the programs costs unnecessarily. During a visit to our Student Veterans of America chapters in Hawaii, it was discovered that options at local campuses were limited; while students sought to attend programs online through leading universities, the low rate of BAH based on the location of the university, not the student, greatly limited the opportunities of these geographically displaced student veterans. Unfortunately, this scenario is all too common, while others are earning BAH at



much higher rates compared to their locality. It is our position that students should not be profiting off of GI Bill payments, as they exist for the purpose of allowing individuals to attend school.

Additionally, we have seen too many instances of this disparity in BAH calculation encouraging abusive behavior on the part of several schools who locate the IHL address in a high-BAH district, while offering the physical course delivery in a low-BAH location while using the lucrative BAH stipend as a recruiting incentive. The converse of this situation is also a major point of contention, and results in harm to the student veteran while enrolled in an IHL as we have demonstrated. We support this legislation which would adjust the calculation to account for the reality of the living situation.

Sec. 106. Charge to entitlement for certain licensure and certification tests and national tests under Department of Veterans Affairs Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program.

This section would allow veterans to apply their GI Bill benefits to afford the cost of certain licensure and certification tests and national tests. Under the current system, veterans who seek to apply their GI Bill benefits to the cost of taking certification or licensing tests are charged an entire month of their entitlement, regardless of how comparatively low the cost of such test is.

It is common sense that veterans would be able to pro-rate the cost of that charge and retain the remaining value of that month's benefit. This measure will prevent veterans from being dissuaded by the current overcharging inconsistency, and instead encourage taking critical tests necessary for career development without paying costs out of pocket. SVA is fully in support of this common-sense solution, which preserves valuable earned benefits for future education requirements.

Sec. 107. Restoration of entitlement to educational assistance and other relief for veterans affected by school closure or disapproval.

This section would allow for the restoration of entitlement to GI Bill benefits for student veterans affected by closures of educational institutions. When 28 IHLs under the Corinthian Colleges system closed, there were hundreds of student veterans that were using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to attend one of those IHLs. Many of these affected students now find themselves stranded, with their lives on-hold. The VA Secretary currently does not have the authority to provide meaningful relief to student veterans who find themselves in such a situation.

The proposal will apply to veterans receiving GI Bill benefits while pursuing a program of education at an IHL that closed, or who withdrew from a closed IHL within 120 days of the closure, to fully restore for tuition payments. Veterans who complete their program of education at another IHL pursuant to a teach-out plan would not be eligible for relief. VA would also have the authority to identify other students veterans who were harmed by their IHL and may be eligible



for such relief.

SVA additionally recommends the inclusion of a provision granting VA the authority to bring appropriate action against an IHL to recover the expenses of providing relief. To ensure that student veterans who have already been harmed can receive relief, the bill would retroactively apply to anyone who received Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits beginning January 1, 2015, thereby covering the Corinthian school closures and those thereafter.

Congress must act to ensure that hard-earned GI Bill benefits are not squandered because of an IHL's failure to serve its students. SVA supports this measure with the conditions of expanding the timeframe to restore entitlement to those affected in the Corinthian closures.

Sec. 108. Inclusion of Fry Scholarship recipients in Yellow Ribbon G.I. Education Enhancement Program.

This section would amend title 38, United States Code, to include the Fry Scholarship in the Yellow Ribbon G.I. Education Enhancement Program. SVA stands with many other organizations in strong support of this legislation that would allow the dependents of a service member who died in the line of duty to access Yellow Ribbon Program benefits.

The Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship goes to families that have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country; we believe they have more than earned the right to attend an IHL of their choice without comparatively minor tuition costs hampering their success. This is a common-sense proposal; frankly it is ridiculous that that this error has existed for nearly a decade and not yet been amended. We look forward to this being expeditiously put into effect. SVA stands in vigorous support for this legislation.

Sec. 109. Additional authorized transfer of unused Post-9/11 Educational Assistance benefits to dependents upon death of originally designated dependent.

This bill would authorize the transfer of unused benefits to dependents upon death of originally designated dependent. At present, in the tragic scenario when a veteran's dependent with transferred GI Bill benefits passes away without using the full extent of those benefits, the unused benefits become unusable. We believe this is an unintended consequence of the way the law is written, and vigorously support this correction, which honors the sacrifice of our military families.

SVA supports this technical correction for transferred GI Bill benefits. Currently, if a service member transfers their GI Bill while alive and subsequently passes, the allocation of benefits and amount allotted to surviving family members is locked in place indefinitely. If the service member or veteran were still living, they could simply adjust the number of months allotted to each family member at will. SVA recommends allowing those entitled to the transferred benefits to determine



the decision and amount of reallocation of benefits as an additional component of this proposal.

Sec. 110. Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship.

This scholarship would be named after Edith Rogers, a long-time Massachusetts Member of Congress and drafter of the Original GI Bill in 1944; Rep. Rogers espouses the spirit of the Got Your 6 empowerment campaign and their focus on empowering women veterans, #shesbadass^{3, 4}. A true champion of veterans, she was one of the first women to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives, and completed her service after nearly 35 years in the House. This scholarship likewise presents veterans with an opportunity to achieve STEM degrees, and in the honor of a woman who equally sought to benefit the country in ways bigger than herself.

This section would amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide additional educational assistance benefits under the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of VA to certain eligible individuals, specifically those seeking STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) degrees. With the current resources provided by the GI Bill, the marginal cost of an additional academic year for student veterans pursuing STEM will yield the essential mass of leaders our country needs. Investing in an additional year for STEM-focused student veterans will ultimately result in economic gains and tighter national security, and supporting this section is the first step.

Presently, 16-20% of all undergraduate students are in pursuit of a STEM degree. While less than one fifth of current students seeking STEM degrees, even fewer achieve them since more than one third of the general population change their major before they graduate. Compare those numbers to what we learned from the research we published this year, the *National Veteran Education Success Tracker (NVEST)*, we found that 14% sought STEM degrees.

The aptitude and interest is clear—the resources to deliver more STEM graduates in the single major barrier to even greater numbers of STEM graduates⁵. According to a report from Georgetown University’s Center of Education and the Workforce, “*The Economic Value of College Majors*”, top-paying college majors earn a total \$3.4 million more than the lowest-paying majors over a lifetime; the top ten highest paying majors are all in STEM fields, eight of which are in engineering⁶.

³ Hachey, Thomas E. (Winter 1973–1974). "American Profiles on Capitol Hill: A Confidential Study for the British Foreign Office in 1943". *Wisconsin Magazine of History*. 57 (2): 141–153.

⁴ Got Your 6, <https://gotyour6.org/impact/shesbadass/>

⁵ Cate, CA, 2017, National Veteran Education Success Tracker, <http://invest.studentveterans.org/>

⁶ Carnevale, Anthony, “The Economic Value of College Majors”, Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce, 2015, https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/valueofcollegemajors/2_



In today's economic environment, the highest paying majors will earn graduates an average mid-career salary of \$136,000. The lowest earning potential includes majors such as studio arts or human services. Such majors earn a mid-career salary of nearly \$100,000 *less* per year. The tax revenue from STEM professionals alone suggests this is a beneficial proposal. The need for STEM-focused professionals with a commitment to service, and the leadership skills to make a difference has never been greater.

Our country faces a key decision point. We are currently affording veterans the opportunity to go to IHLs, but we must determine what shapes this new and dynamic workforce. After these veterans graduate, wouldn't we prefer that our country gains scientists, engineers, cybersecurity professionals, physicists, and other high-demand professionals? The marginal cost of an additional academic year is well-worth the added short-term cost, noting the long-term benefit to the economy.

Veterans should not be forced to decide between continued service through a STEM career, and the financial burden that mitigates the value of their earned GI Bill benefits. It has long been our goal to see every veteran maximize the potential of their GI Bill, and this is the answer. It would otherwise take years to find other graduates with level of experience and knowledge that veterans already possess—time we simply do not have.

The ability and expertise of these veterans, when coupled with a STEM education, will be an unparalleled force. Our service members are routinely exposed to highly technical equipment, processes, and environments, often with lives depending on their ability to succeed in high-pressure situations. We know they can, and do, succeed when given the opportunity.

When determining our support for this proposal, we consider the long-term economic impact of increased tax revenue from higher-paid STEM professionals; we consider the national security need for leaders in these fields; and we consider how the previous GI Bill prepared our country for the most modern workforce of its time. We know veterans have a demonstrated commitment to service, and the leadership skills necessary to make the country's STEM fields an unmatched force.

SVA recognizes Rep. David McKinley (WV-1) and Rep. Dina Titus (NV-1) for initially proposing this concept in 2015. Their foresight recognized the need and value of such a scholarship, and we look forward to the Rogers STEM Scholarship becoming a reality.

Sec. 111. Honoring the national service of members of the Armed Forces by elimination of time limitation for use of entitlement.



We believe that veteran education benefits are not a cost of war, but instead a right of service. We believe that education opportunities should be a lifetime benefit, and thus require the removal of the current 15-year delimiting date within Chapter 33 benefits. Such an arbitrary cap on the opportunity to use this earned benefit serves only as a hindrance to the success of veterans.

In addition to the removal of the 15-year limit, it is imperative that the GI Bill no longer be considered through the strict lens of wartime eras. Indeed, tying education benefits to wartime eras led to each previous iteration of the benefit being cut. As a component of service, there should be one bill that serves all current and future veterans, and therefore should be updated in name to reflect this timeless concept, as “The Veterans Education Assistance Act” or referred to simply as the GI Bill. This simplified naming convention may seem minor, but it’s importance is far-reaching as the re-naming of the benefit indicates its importance to all generations of veterans.

Sec. 112. Monthly stipend for certain members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces receiving Post -9/11 Educational Assistance.

This section would pro-rate the housing allowance to reflect periods when the service member is not on active duty and allow them to fully partake in their earned housing allowance under their GI Bill benefits. While many National Guard and Reserve members continue to serve while attending an IHL, many lose eligibility for GI Bill housing allowances when ordered to duty under title 10, United States Code. Caught between active duty, though receiving an insufficient housing allowance from the active duty service, and coupled with the inability to receive GI Bill housing payments, the veteran is punished for their continued service. This technical change would address this oversight.

Sec. 113. Improvement of information technology of the Veterans’ Benefits Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This section would direct the VA Secretary to make improvements to the information technology system of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) of VA. The directs that to the maximum extent possible, VBA should access information technology (IT) funding to address critical IT infrastructure updates. Presently VA’s Office of IT (OIT) functions as a collective funding source for the total VA; simply put, individual departments have no dedicated resources for IT needs.

The result of VA’s current IT resourcing model structure is that OIT must constantly determine the highest priority needs of the VA as a whole, leaving some departments with a low level of resources for sustained periods of time. The dedication of these resources will allow the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) with the opportunity to receive necessary support in IT upgrade which directly the ability of VA to effectively process payments of benefits to student veterans.



Sec. 114. Department of Veterans Affairs high technology pilot program.

This section proposes to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a high technology education pilot program. The proposal would operate as a five-year pilot program, funded for up to \$15 million annually. SVA views this as complimentary to existing education programs, and addresses the need to develop innovative programs targeted at non-traditional students. The split payment requirement incentivizes providers to deliver high quality programs with high-impact and successful student outcomes.

With an increase in innovation in higher education with companies like Dog Tag Bakery at Georgetown University, the education industry is beginning to recognize the need to adapt to more flexible or hybrid models for new generations of students. It is unclear if the contracts under this proposal reset annually, or how those funds are to be dispersed, however SVA is confident that such logistical details would be minor hurdles when compared to the overall benefit of this concept.

The industry desire for such a program is clear, including support from the Information Technology Industry Council (ITI), the global voice of the tech sector.⁷ Over 60 members of ITI include technology giants such as Google, Twitter, Amazon, Facebook, Adobe, Microsoft, IBM, Intel and many others.⁸ Like VA's Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), SVA is eager to learn about the outcomes of this proposal.

Sec. 201. Work-study allowance.

This section would amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the authority to provide work-study allowance for certain activities by individuals receiving educational assistance by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The VA Work-Study Program is widely accepted as a highly beneficial system that provides student veterans the opportunity to earn additional income while attending an IHL, and simultaneously support the broader mission of VA.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill is the most comprehensive and generous education benefit ever offered, though it often does not cover the total costs student veterans' experience. As the quintessential non-traditional students, student veterans are often more mature by age and experience, 52% have families, and 18% are single parents. Roughly half of student veterans work full-time while attending an IHL, and another 25% work part-time. With nearly 780,000 student veterans working while attending an IHL, it is clear that the demand for this opportunity is high.

⁷ ITI letter to the Honorable Kevin McCarthy, "Re: H.R. 1989, the Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses Act", April 25, 2017.

⁸ Information Technology Industry Council, Member Companies, <http://www.itic.org/about/member-companies>, Accessed June 10, 2017



Sec. 202. Duration of educational assistance under Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program.

This section modifies the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) Program from 45 months of educational benefits to 36 months. The benefits of survivors and dependents would be comparable to those of the servicemembers. The DEA hasn't been updated to reflect the rising costs of college in many years, and unfairly offers survivors a lower rate. The compression of months is more reflective of the typical time to completion rate. Also, the change will afford an increase in the current payment rates, while maintain a budget-neutral, or cost reduction benefit.

Sec. 203. Olin E. Teague increase in amounts of educational assistance payable under Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program.

This section would increase the amounts of educational assistance payable under DEA. In conjunction with section 202, this will provide survivors with an increased benefit, which is desperately needed due to the outdated payment rates. Unfortunately, many survivors are ineligible for the Fry Scholarship because the service member died prior to September 11, 2001, or were separated with a medical discharge and passed away as a retiree. It is our unwavering position that family members of the fallen utilizing these benefits earned with the ultimate sacrifice should be viewed as equal to veterans themselves for the purposes of education benefits.

Sec. 301. State approving agency funding.

This section proposes an increase in resources provided to State Approving Agencies (SAA), the primary oversight and approval entities that determine program eligibility for GI Bill benefits. SVA believes that SAAs are a critical component to ensuring quality education, preventing fraud and abuse, and looking out for student veterans who may be subject to bad practices at various IHLs.

SAAs are effectively the gatekeepers of the GI Bill. Yet, the amount of resources provided to them has not kept pace with inflation and rising costs. We continue to urge congress to increase support for SAAs, and are pleased to see the inclusion of this legislation. The amount of resources spent on oversight should reflect the importance of resources spent in educational benefits; as such SVA supports the recommendations of the National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) to increase funding from \$19 million to \$26 million.

Sec. 302. Authorization for use of Post-9/11 Educational Assistance to pursue independent study programs at certain educational institutions that are not institutions of higher learning.

This section permits veterans to use Post-9/11 Educational Assistance for an accredited



independent study program (including open circuit television) at an educational institution that is an area career and technical education IHL or a postsecondary vocational IHL providing postsecondary level education.

Sec. 303. Provision of information on priority enrollment for veterans in certain courses of education.

This section proposes that, pursuant to subsection (b)(5) of Title 38 section 3698, the Secretary of VA will seek to collect information on whether or not IHLs operate priority enrollment programs. In discussions with dozens of higher education organizations, it is abundantly clear that there is a lack of information regarding the existence or application of priority enrollment programs as it pertains to student veterans.

The majority of student veterans are non-traditional students, and many have spouses, children, and careers. It is true that they do not have the luxury of waiting a year or a few semesters to take a required course when their livelihood is in the balance. SVA believes collection of this information over time will provide a strong basis for understanding the need and potential solutions to applying this concept, as well as the proper level that such programs should be applied.

Sec. 304. Limitation on use of reporting fees payable to educational institutions and sponsors of programs of apprenticeship.

This section proposes increasing reporting fees as high as \$16 per number of eligible veterans to execute or offset services required to process benefits. It also requires them to use the money for veterans. SVA believes the reporting fees to be critical components of offsetting the cost of administering GI Bill education benefits at the institution level; we also support requiring this reporting fee be accounted for appropriately as well as being expended on activities related to the execution of veteran benefit processing.

Some concern has been expressed that IHLs with very few veterans would be caused undue strain in establishing a separate account for such a low number of students. As such, SVA supports setting a threshold to require IHLs with significant populations to adhere to this requirement, to avoid IHLs with only several student veterans from experiencing undue accounting strain as result of this provision.

Sec. 305. Training for school certifying officials.

This section codifies the requirements for school certifying officials (SCO) training. SVA supports this provision, as the training provided through VA is critical for SCO's to maintain a high level of professional aptitude. In some cases, IHLs have not allowed SCOs to attend training, alleging that it



was not required. This requirement removes any doubt about the importance of that training.

Sec. 306. Extension of authority for Advisory Committee on Education.

This section extends the authority of the VA Advisory Committee on Education (VACOE), an advisory body of subject matter experts that provide the Secretary of VA input on veteran issues in higher education. Previously, SVA provided input at through this forum to highlight necessary reform changes and statute which legally required VA to establish an agreement with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

Upon recommendation to the Secretary of VA at the 2015 VACOE meeting, the agreement with FTC was reached. This is an example of the significant value and detailed level of policy analysis that the VACOE can provide to the Secretary. Additionally, SVA recommends the inclusion of a current student veteran to incorporate the perspective of those directly impacted by these policies, and looks forward to working with VA on implementing this recommendation.

Sec. 307. Department of Veterans Affairs provision of on-campus educational and vocational counseling for veterans.

This section would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide educational and vocational counseling for veterans on campuses of institutions of higher learning, and codify the program. SVA has been a long-time supporter of the VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program, which entails the campus having a VSOC Counselor, an expert full-time VA detailee, right on campus. We frequently hear student veterans identify the VSOC program as a top benefit that they find to be most valuable for their higher education experience.

In providing feedback to SVA regarding the VSOC program, one student veteran shared, “We have a VSOC Counselor from VA come to the IHL twice a month so Vets can start a new claim or ask questions concerning a claim. This helps immensely as the VA hospital is a 35-minute drive from IHL and keeps our Vets on campus. Vets can ask our counselor any type of question concerning their benefits. They are also a Vocational Rehabilitation (VocRehab) counselor for a few of the Vets on campus. We are incredibly lucky to have this program on campus.”

In addition to appreciating the on-site access to a qualified VA counselor, many alluded to a direct personal impact on their academic performance. Another student veteran shared, “The VSOC has been there to help me through the transition from soldier to student. Counseling, advising, financial help, even tutoring has been afforded to me through the VSOC. The VA representative has gone above and beyond to help me succeed, especially when IHL and life became overwhelming for me.”

These comments are indicative of the general feedback we received from members over the past



several months in our field research on the program. In addition to the general support provided by VSOC counselors, student veterans noted the ability of counselors to quickly correct and process certifications as a major benefit to their campus. They often appreciated the connection counselors make with IHL administration as well. We believe the VSOC program is highly beneficial to student veterans and would like to see it expanded as resources allow.

Sec. 308. Provision of information regarding veteran entitlement to educational assistance.

This section proposes allowing IHLs to view the total and remaining amount of educational benefits of a veteran thereby allowing the IHL to properly counsel those veterans on their financial obligation and IHL requirements. This is a simple change with a significant impact, enabling greater communication between the IHL and the veteran.

SVA is pleased to see the inclusion of an opt-out option for students who do not wish their IHL to have access to this information. In some cases, the potential for low-quality schools to use this information to the advantage of the school instead of the student is of concern. The opt-out option allows the student to manage this risk by providing them a mechanism to prevent their school from accessing the information regarding their GI Bill benefits.

Sec. 309. Treatment, for purposes of educational assistance administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, of educational courses that begin seven or fewer days after the first day of an academic term.

This section would allow IHL SCO and regional processing officers (RPO) the ability to define a “calendar week” for the purpose of education benefits as “the seven-day period beginning on the first day of the institution’s published academic calendar”. At present, VA defines a calendar week as being from Sunday to Sunday, while policy guidance for SCOs necessitates that those officials process terms depending on the first date the class meets for that period of the week. This minor technical discrepancy has led to some confusion in processing benefits, as well as duplicative efforts. SVA supports this change to reflect the reality of processing these benefits consistent with our interpretation of the congressional intent of the benefit.

Sec. 401. Eligibility of reserve component members for Post 9/11 Educational Assistance.

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Sec. 402. Time limitation for training and rehabilitation for veterans with service-connected disabilities.

Sections 401 and 402 recognize the service of National Guard and Reserve Members and ensures that an order to serve on active duty under sections 12304a and 12304b of title 10, United States



Code, is treated the same as other orders to serve on active duty for the purposes of determining benefits eligibility of service members and veterans.

Many of these service members perform the exact same duties as their active duty counterparts, yet they realize none of the benefits. Fixing this discrepancy is a top priority for SVA, as well as nearly 40 other military, veteran, and higher education organizations that identified this issue with unanimous consent as being an imperative change.⁹

This section will fix an issue affecting thousands of National Guard and Reserve members have been negatively impacted. Deployments such as the deployment of an array of Marine Corps Reserve units as part of the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF) in 2016 experienced this issue first-hand. In the case of the SPMAGTF, nearly 300 Marine Corps Reservists were inaccurately advised from senior leadership that they would receive GI Bill Benefits, among other entitlements, for their active duty service.

Those Marines and Sailors spent nearly six months serving in austere conditions, including several weeks as the initial reaction force in Haiti immediately following Hurricane Matthew¹⁰. While these servicemembers served side by side with their active duty counterparts, the Marine Reservists learned toward the end of the deployment that due to their activation code (12304b), they would not be eligible for GI Bill benefits.

Many of those young men and women had looked forward to earning an education, and were abruptly forced to drastically alter their education timelines. These sections would address the negative effects of this technical oversight, and empower these servicemembers to finally pursue their education goals.

Sec. 501. Repeal inapplicability of modification of basic allowance for housing to benefits under laws administered by Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

This section proposes aligning the basic allowance for housing under the Secretary of Veterans Affairs with the cost of adequate housing as determined by the Secretary of Defense. SVA supports this provision as it is grounded in common sense, while affording the opportunity to address the many issues presented within the previous sections.

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⁹ GI Bill Roundtable meeting, The American Legion Headquarters, May 18, 2017

¹⁰ Joint Task Force Matthew Arrives in Haiti To Provide Relief Efforts, Oct 7, 2016, <http://www.marines.mil/News/News-Display/Article/967658/joint-task-force-matthew-arrives-in-haiti-to-provide-relief-efforts/>



We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and the Committee members for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veterans in higher education. We also want to recognize the dedication of the Chairman’s staff, especially Jon Clark, Kelsey Baron, Caroline Ponseti, and Tiffany Haverly, who have dedicated countless hours to refining these provisions in close coordination with their colleagues in the Senate. As always, we welcome your feedback and questions, and we look forward to continuing to work with this committee, the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, and the entire congress to ensure the success of all generations of veterans through education.



Information Required by Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives

Pursuant to Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, SVA has not received any federal grants in Fiscal Year 2017, nor has it received any federal grants in the two previous Fiscal Years.



William Hubbard, Vice President of Government Affairs

Will Hubbard joined the professional staff of Student Veterans of America in February 2014. Mr. Hubbard is frequently called to testify to Congress on a variety of topics related to higher education and veterans. He also regularly advises the White House and senior executives of the Administration on the interests of student veterans and higher education policy.



Mr. Hubbard received his Bachelors in International Studies from American University. After graduating, he spent several years serving government agencies to include the Department of the Navy, Department of State, and the State of Indiana Department of Revenue in his role as a Federal Strategy and Operations Consultant.

As a National Executive Committee Member of Deloitte's Armed Forces Business Resource Group, Mr. Hubbard was dedicated to the achievement of veterans, and led the successful proposal of two veteran-focused pro bono projects. Prior to his career in consulting, he co-founded a successful startup business in the snack food industry, which expanded placement into 14 local stores.

Most recently, Mr. Hubbard deployed to Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) to conduct force protection activities including threat assessments, review of the human terrain, and liaison with joint operations units as well as executive-level embassy personnel. The mission included operations in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and humanitarian assistance to Haiti in the days after Hurricane Matthew.

Mr. Hubbard joined the Marine Corps Reserve in 2006 and initially served with 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines. Today, he continues to serve at Quantico, VA, and most recently deployed to Central America with a Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force. He has served SVA at both the chapter and national levels, and has been passionate about veterans' issues since entering the armed services.