



**STATEMENT OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION**

**TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

ON

EXAMINING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS' SERVICES TO VETERANS

NOVEMBER 4, 2013

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the 2.4 million members of The American Legion I thank you for this opportunity to submit The American Legion's views at this hearing titled, "*Examining Higher Education Institutions' Services to Veterans.*" We appreciate the efforts of this Subcommittee to address the needs of the men and women who are currently serving and those who served during past conflicts.

Education is increasingly essential to success in the American job market. Whether obtaining a traditional liberal education or pursuing a job credential, the shift in the American economy from manufacturing-based to information-based has necessitated a radical increase in the need for higher education. Paradoxically, there is a simultaneous increase in skepticism regarding the value of higher education among many, given the rise in academic hyper-specialization. Nevertheless, many of the fastest-growing sectors of the U.S. economy require post-secondary education and/or credentialing. According to the Commission on the Future of Higher Education's 2006 report, "The transformation of the world economy increasingly demands a more highly educated workforce with postsecondary skills and credentials. Ninety percent of the fastest-growing jobs in the new information and service economy will require some postsecondary education. Job categories that require only on-the-job training are expected to see the greatest decline."¹ Therefore, as veterans transition from military service, there will be an increasing need for them to utilize their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to acquire relevant and necessary education in order for them to be competitive in the current job market.

It has become increasingly apparent that there is a need to obtain information on student outcomes and ensure the transparency of institutions of higher learning, while providing quantitative information on student-veterans, in order to assess America's return-on-investment in the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Taxpayers deserve to know how their money is being used. But, even more importantly, veterans looking to utilize their earned education benefits deserve to be given a fair deal, *and* deserve to be given transparency so that they are able to make fully-informed decisions regarding their education. Data regarding the accreditation, pricing, and student outcomes of a given institution of higher learning must be made available to facilitate these decisions, which is why The American Legion agrees with the Commission on the Future of Higher Education report, that recommends metrics be developed for accurately reporting this data, and that the data should be made available to students, and reported publicly in aggregate form to provide consumers and policymakers an accessible, comprehensible way in order to better promote informed decision-making by all relevant stakeholders.²

In 2012, The American Legion, along with other veteran service organizations, advocated for the *Improving Transparency of Education for Veterans Act*, which was enacted into law on January 10, 2013 as Public Law 112-249. The law requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to develop a comprehensive policy to improve outreach and transparency to service members and veterans, including the provision of information on institutions of higher learning. The law further requires VA to create a centralized mechanism for tracking and publishing feedback from

¹ Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2006). *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, September 2006, 6

² *Ibid.*, 23

students and State Approving Agencies (SAA) regarding the quality of instruction, recruiting practices, and post-graduation employment placement of institutions of higher learning that:

- Protects the privacy of students, by not publishing the names of students; and
- Publishes only feedback that conforms to the criteria for relevancy that VA shall determine

The law also requires VA to provide specific post-secondary education information as part of its effort to deliver effective methods to provide beneficiaries with accurate information regarding post-secondary education and training opportunities that are available. Considering the taxpayer's significant federal investment in programs and institutions, policymakers should demand better information about the effectiveness of higher education. Public Law 112-249, coupled with Executive Order 13607: *Establishing Principles of Excellence of Education Institutions Serving Service members, Veterans, and Spouses, and Other Family Members*, have been good starting point.

However, there is still much work to be done. The American Legion believes that more data would empower veterans to make better informed decisions regarding their education, and would allow policymakers and other stakeholders to more accurately assess possible policy adjustments. Some of the specific data points that The American Legion believes are relevant, and should be researched and made available include:

- The number of part-time, adult, military, remedial, and Pell Grant students who are successfully completing degrees.
- Data regarding students who do not complete programs: whether they are transferring to other schools or dropping out altogether.
- The percentage of tuition paid out-of-pocket by the student versus the percentage the institution receives from government sources.
- The amount of overhead debt students are being burdened with, and whether they are paying back their loans – especially students who do not complete their degrees.
- Whether students are finding jobs in their fields.
- Whether students are continuing on to graduate school.

Under the Higher Education Act of 1965, institutions of higher learning are required to report their 4 and 6 year graduation rate to the Department of Education; however, the metrics utilized only call for the reporting of first-time, full-time students. Thus, some relevant data is already available to stakeholders; unfortunately, this data fails to capture the outcomes of the majority of student veterans. Veterans, by and large, do not fall into the “first-time, full-time” category – typically veteran students are adults, attending part-time, perhaps online, and may have previously taken post-secondary classes in some form. Changing these metrics to better capture

the student-veteran population – as well as the growing number of other non-first time, full-time students in higher education – would be a step in the right direction.

The National Student Clearinghouse is a second source of data available to stakeholders. This is an organization dedicated to serving the education community by facilitating the exchange and understanding of student enrollment, performance and related information. In terms of compliance reporting, the National Student Clearinghouse collects current enrollment and graduation data from the vast majority of American institutions of higher learning, and in turn makes the data available to the Department of Education, and various other stakeholders. In this way, data is collected and made available without posing risks to student-veterans' privacy. Again, however, it fails to track student-veterans specifically. Therefore, The American Legion believes it necessary to develop metrics and data-collection which tracks student-veterans specifically, from the beginning of their higher-education experience through its completion: their transition into the workforce.³

The American Legion also would like data that clearly delineates the impact of “alternative credits” in the overall success of student veterans. Alternative credit is credit which may be granted for experiences garnered outside of traditional classroom settings. For example, students may be granted credit for successfully passing a prior learning assessment, or for military or job experience. Data correlating the granting of this type of credit with student outcomes would be useful in assessing the importance of this type of credit to overall student success.

In sum, The American Legion urges the embrace of outcomes-focused data systems which provide information that enable stakeholders to make informed decisions. These systems must provide the data necessary to calculate “return-on-investment” measures, as well as promoting continuous improvement within higher education institutions and training programs. These data will also provide valuable feedback to policymakers as they seek to optimize policies directed at tracking and improving student outcomes. Timely, contextual, and actionable data are vital to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment – all of which are critical to improving the outcomes of our education and workforce development systems.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit the recommendations of The American Legion on this issue.

For additional information regarding this testimony, please contact Mr. Shaun Rieley at The American Legion's Legislative Division, (202) 999-6881 or srieley@legion.org.

³ The American Legion Resolution No. 67: *Student-Veteran Return-On-Investment Education Outcome*

Albert R. Renteria



Albert R. Renteria, born March 2, 1957, a Chicago, Illinois native, began his military career in 1974, retiring in 2000. Throughout his 26 year career, Renteria developed a strategic and logistical mindset that influenced his post service course, developing, forming and founding two successful national nonprofits

(Operation Interdependence® (OI) and Southwest Veterans' Business Resource Center (SWVBRC)) and his current firm, best known as The ARRC™, Strategically Driven Logistically Minded®. OI is the brainchild of retired chief warrant officer Renteria. The idea began to formulate during Renteria's tour of duty in the Gulf War. There, he was

charged with the task of supporting the requirement to assign personnel to receive and distribute goods donated by civilians and U. S. companies, for use by individuals stationed abroad.

Renteria was exposed to the challenges of dividing and delivering these items to individuals, without compromising the manpower required for the particular mission's needs. Over the ensuing years, he thought carefully about possible solutions for maintaining the level of necessary personnel during vital overseas operations, while at the same time balancing the desires of U. S. Citizens to reach out and support their overseas men and women.

Renteria joined the Tri-City Council Navy League of the United States in July of 2001, and assumed the presidency 2002, selected as a national director and served as the Pacific Southwest Regional President, 2003, also serving as the Pacific War Memorial Oceanside CA President during 2004. He is a life member of several Veteran service organizations and actively pursues a collaborative effort. Renteria is a member of the congressionally chartered Advisory Committee on Veteran Business Affairs and California Department Veteran Affairs Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise Advisory Council. Renteria was awarded the 2011 SBA Veteran Business Champion of the year. In conjunction with this effort, Renteria's entrepreneurial spirit blossomed, a sole proprietor of Albert R. Renteria Enterprise since April 1, 2000, Renteria embraced the many facets of developing his own business to achieve his vision to incorporate April 1, 2010, his ten year plan Albert R. Renteria Corporation (The ARRC™).

The cornerstone of Renteria's success is driven by his military experience and education. The beginning of his efforts set the path for his next endeavor to develop and found the SWVBRC, Where Communities Serve Veterans®, in concert with the support of communities will serve Veterans and active duty members that have served in any military component through outreach and education programs. The SWVBRC was incorporated May 21, 2008 in the state of California in honor of Memorial Day.

Renteria has served in many leadership roles, both in the public and private sector, too many to mention. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in computer science, a Master of Science degree in electronic commerce and is a PHD Learner studying organization behavior. Renteria is decorated with two Meritorious Service Medals, three Navy Commendation Medals and a Navy Achievement Medal. A Gulf War Veteran, Renteria proudly signs off in his signature "Service Never Ends for a Marine". Married to the former Ms. Lori Margo since 1976, and proud father of three adult children, Angelina, Albert Jr., Daniel and grandson Anpetu Wi Topa Black Calf.