



STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA
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**TESTIMONY OF
MR. JARED LYON
PRESIDENT & CEO
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BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON THE TOPIC OF:
H.R. 748, H.R. 2551, H.R. 3286, H.R. 3419, H.R. 4138**

AND

ALL SUBSEQUENTIAL DRAFT BILLS

APRIL 14TH, 2016

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Established in 2008, Student Veterans of America has grown to become a force and voice for the interests of veterans in higher education. With nearly 1,400 chapters across the country, we are pleased to share the



perspective of those most directly impacted by this subject with this committee. With a myriad of programs supporting their success, rigorous research development seeking 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, nothing is more paramount than their success in school to prepare them for productive and impactful lives.

GI Bill STEM Extension Act of 2015

For most veterans hoping to enter the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, also known as the STEM fields, they are faced with the harsh reality that entrance into these majors requires starting their college career at the pre-college math level, such as pre-calculus and pre-algebra. This holds true for many of the sciences such as chemistry, physics, and biology. The additional time that it takes for a veteran to complete a STEM degree easily pushes graduation passed the standard 36 months allotted by the Post-9/11 GI Bill. We at SVA see that the extra year need for graduation completion discourages many veterans from pursuing STEM degrees. A plan to provide one extra year of GI Bill benefits to STEM degree-seeking veterans would alleviate this concern, giving veterans the extra time needed to complete their degree.

A study done by Georgetown University in 2015 reviewed the Economic Value of College Majors in the United States. That study uncovered that the highest annual wages earned after graduation came from the career STEM field. Individuals who complete a STEM degree earn an average of \$65,000 a year when starting their career whereas non-STEM degree graduates earned \$50,000 annually. Additionally, this study revealed that the least popular undergraduate majors for student to pursue were all in the STEM fields. It is our hope that the GI Bill STEM Extension Act of 2015 will influence transitioning service member to pursue STEM degrees without the discouragement of incurring additional debt. Additionally, it is our hope that this bill will encourage current STEM majors to complete their degree as opposed to changing to a degree that requires less time in school.

We propose some changes to the language in H.R. 748. The new language the GI Bill Extension Act will authorize 33,000 veteran STEM majors in need of an additional year of GI Bill benefits to ability the complete their degree. To achieve this we recommend the following changes:

1. A one-time stipend of \$30,000 to cover ALL expenses. It will be the veteran's responsibility to spend the money on tuition and rent.
2. This benefited will only be available to veterans.
3. Restrict usage to only the classes required to achieve the degree.
4. First priority given to students that require the most number of credit hours to achieve their degree.
5. Limit the use of degrees listed in lines 5-13 on page 3 of the legislation. Delete lines 14-21.
6. If the veteran does not complete the program, excluding death in the family, personal illness (including PTS), unexpected relocation, unexpected family illness (including caretaking of family members), the amount paid will be reimbursed over a period of 6 years of \$5,000 a year.
7. Veterans who receive less than 100% of the GI Bill will receive the percentage they are qualified for of the one-time payment of \$30,000. Veterans who qualify for 100% GI Bill tuition will be awarded before individuals who are not qualified for 100% GI Bill payments.

With STEM majors paying an average of \$260,000 more in taxes than non-STEM majors over their lifetime, we see a return on investment, if this Bill were to move forward, of \$8.6 Billion. \$7.6 Billion more than the cost to the government to fund this initiative. That is a return of around \$8 for every \$1 spent.

Because of this, SVA fully supports the GI Bill Extension Act of 2015 and hopes to remain part of the discussion on how to improve the economic impact of STEM majors in the United States by motivating transitioning service members to enter into these fields of study.



The GI Bill Oversight Act of 2016

Over the past eight years, Student Veterans of America has worked hard to protect veterans pursuing their higher education degrees. Unfortunately, primarily due to 90/10, we have seen predatory practices on veterans by less than reputable educational institutions. Year after year, we hear of stories where veterans were cheated by “bad actors” in the educational realm with no recourse to recoup their hard-earned GI Bill benefits.

The GI Bill Oversight Act of 2016 is a step in the right direction in protecting student Veterans from less than honorable institutions. Requiring the Inspector General to investigate institutions of higher learning that have been found guilty by any Federal or State agency for deceptive or misleading practices, will help protect Veterans from these predatory institutions.

However, we do propose some changes to the language. We would recommend removing lines 15 to 22 on page 2 of the Draft Bill. We find that by instigating an investigation by the Inspector General when an institution is currently being investigated at the State or Federal level or in any class action lawsuit for deceptive or misleading practices is too broad in nature. We feel that an investigation after an institution is found guilty is more appropriate. Sections (1) “is the defendant in a class action lawsuit for deceptive or misleading practices” and (2) “is under investigation by any Federal or State Agency for deceptive or misleading practices” is triggering an investigation before the outcome of the case is determined. We feel that allocating Federal resources to every school under investigation or in a lawsuit might overwhelm the Inspector General and target schools under investigation but are considered by the general education community as “good actors”. Section (3) “has been found guilty by any Federal or State agency of deceptive or misleading practices” is much more focused and we feel this language will help capture the “bad actors” of the educational industry.

Our suggestion would be to reword line 18 to 22 (sections 3699, (a), (1) and (2)) to be more specific or remove section (1) and reword the term “investigation” in section (2) to something less direct. Additionally, we support the concept of notifying students when an investigation has started (3699, (b), (A), (B) – Line 1 to 7 on page 3). This will allow a more informed consumer, which is a subject we always support.

Although we support the GI Bill Oversight Act of 2016, we feel that there is some room to improve the language of the Bill to fully capture the “Bad Actors” that abuse the GI Bill and veterans while still protecting reputable institutions. We would absolutely welcome the chance to be a party in the furthered discussion of this Bill.

The Support for Student Veterans with Families Act

A Census Survey done by Student Veterans of America (appendix A:), shows that there is a significant concern among single parents who served in the military and are currently enrolled in higher education in regards to accessing and paying for child care. With over 70,000 single veteran parents attending institutions of higher learning, this is a topic that we cannot ignore. Our study shows that 49% of current student veterans have indicated that childcare had a negative or extremely negative impact on their budget. Additionally, 20% of student veterans indicated that their current childcare status had a negative impact on their academic goals.

As more service members enter into the student arena, we see the issue of childcare increasing with no Federal initiative to help these families. That is why we are pleased that H.R. 3419 – Support for Student Veterans with Families Act was proposed. The discussion on how to help veterans attending higher education, although not new, has been overlooked for some time. We applauded the committee for taking action on this particular issue.

Student Veterans of America supports the general concept of H.R. 3419, and we value the diligence that has gone into this Bill, however, we do have some concern over the effects of specific language in the Bill. Precisely the Use of Funds, Limitations, and Authorization of Appropriations sections. Under the section “Use of Funds” we would recommend removing section (A) “establish or expand a child care center on the campus of educational



institutions” which would then negate the need for section (2) where “at least 75 percent of the new child care services funded by the grant to students [...] are veterans”.

We feel this particular language is would be difficult for an institution of higher education to achieve without excessive programmatic issues associated with the implementation of the program. We do, however, support the language in section (B) in “Use of Funds” where the VA would “pay the cost of providing child care services to students enrolled in courses of education offered by the educational institution at a child care center located on the campus of the educational institutions”, but would recommend including language such as, “if the educational institution did not have child care then a payment would be made to the veteran to supplement the cost of child care off campus”.

Finally, SVA would caution against the language used in section (e) “Authorization of Appropriations”. Student Veterans of America would like to see a specific amount of funds as opposed to an arbitrary amount.

Bill 2551: Veterans’ Entry to Apprenticeship Act

Student Veterans of America supports the Veterans’ Entry to Apprenticeship Act. Skills such as blue print reading, tool use, and map reading are important trade skills generally not taught during an apprenticeship. These are skill needed before one starts an accredited apprenticeship and allowing the GI Bill to be used to gain this valuable information can help veteran enter into high need skill based programs.

Although there are many schools that offer pre-apprenticeship programs and certification options, not all schools are accredited. In many instances, accreditation of the degree or program you complete may be required in order to become certified to work in the field. Because of this, we highly suggest the language in this Bill applies to only programs that are accredited. The language in section 3687A; (3), (4), and (5) seem to suppress any concerns of abuses.

Bill 3286: HIRE Vets Act

Although Student Veterans of America primarily deals with educational issues, it is important where our students end up after completion of their degree. The HIRE Vets Act is a great way for transitioning service members and student veterans to seek out organizations that have a history of hiring and retaining veteran employees.

Student Veterans of America has always remained steadfast that an informed consumer can make the best decisions for himself or herself. The HIRE Vets Act will help veterans make these informed decisions. Because of this, we support the HIRE Vets Act and look forward to promoting these prestigious organizations with exemplary veteran employment practices.

Bill 4138: To authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to recoup relocation expenses paid to or on behalf of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Student Veterans of America supports any Bill that allows the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to cut down on waste and abuse. Any abuse of funds in the VA not only hurts the VA as a whole but additionally all programs administered by the VA. The latest scandal where \$275,000 of VA funds were used for questionable moving expenses could have helped veterans get a degree or fund other much-needed VA programs.

We applaud Chairman Miller for his dedication to stop waste in abuse in the VA. We hope that this Bill moves forward and we at Student Veterans of America support this legislation.

Draft Bill: Sec. 4 Training for School Certifying Officials.



This Bill, requiring the Secretary of Veteran Affairs to train school certifying officials, is a much-needed change in how institutions decide who should be a School Certifying Official. Although there is currently an educational program to train VA Certifying Officials, this training is not mandatory. The online training schedule can be found at: http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/school_training_resources.asp

It is estimated to take anywhere from a week to 3 weeks to complete. We feel that schools who do not have trained certifying officials should not be eligible to offer courses or educational assistance to veterans given that the training is minimal. We would recommend, however, to allow 90 days for the School Certifying Official to complete the online training. This would insure that if a trained certifying official left the institution, the university would have appropriate time to find a replacement and train them as a certifying official.

Student Veterans of America supports this Bill. It would add oversight to institutions and require their certifying official to learn about the GI Bill, which could lead to more informed student veterans.

Draft Bill: Sec. 6 Reduction of Amount of Housing Stipend Payments for Reduction of Course Hours.

Student Veterans of America understand that sometimes it is necessary for an individual to change their full time student status to part time. We also agree that when an individual changes their status, their BAH should be reduced and over payments should be reimbursed. We have reservations with removing future BAH payments to recoup overpayments in the past.

If a student were to disenroll from a class and become part-time because of family issues in the last month of a semester, not only would their BAH be reduced but all overpayments for the past few months would be removed from that current month's BAH. We feel that this might lead to having a veteran, who already has personal issues, finding themselves in a financial struggle.

We support section (2) (line 2 to 7 on page 5) in its entirety, however, we would recommend striking line 8 – 17 respectfully. By deducting overpayments of future BAH payments, you can put veterans in an undue financial burden. Student Veterans of America agrees with all supplementary sections represented in this draft Bill.

Draft Bill: Research Program to Evaluate Effectiveness of Transition Assistance Program in Addressing Needs of Certain Minority Veterans.

Student Veterans of America prides itself on the amount of data collection and analysis we perform each year. From the Million Records Project to the NVEST project, we increasingly learn more about student veterans. We see the value in data and how it can help decision makers choose the right response for a particular problem.

Requiring the Secretary of Labor, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and Secretary of the Department of Defense, to evaluate the Transition Assistance Program will help capture much needed data. Being that the target audience is women veterans, veterans with disabilities, Native American Veterans, and other groups of minority veterans' status we feel that any information on these minority groups can help determine policy decisions in the future.

Any data on veterans is valuable in understanding the issues veterans face. We support this Bill and look forward to being pleased to add to this subject.

Draft Bill: Veterans Success on Campus Act of 2016.

Informed consumers is a subject that Student Veterans of America feels strongly about. We maintain that the sooner a transitioning service member is able to understand their GI Bill Benefits, which school is most appropriate for them, and how to achieve their overall goal, the more likely that individual will transition into the work force as an employable, highly trained, military veteran.



Authorizing on-campus educational and vocational counseling is progress and we hope to see this Bill move forward. We would also like to see this same education and vocation counseling before a veteran enters into the education realm. We feel the best time to instruct a transitioning service member about their future in education and the work force is before they transition out of the military. We would strongly recommend applying this same language to the Transition Assistants Program.

Final Thoughts

SVA's motto is "Yesterday's Warriors, Today's Scholars, Tomorrow's Leaders". It is our goal to help Veterans transition from Military Warriors into Civilian Leaders. The GI Bill is paramount in this transition and currently helps over one million veterans to attend higher education. We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and the Subcommittee Members for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veterans in higher education. As always, we welcome your feedback and questions, and we look forward to continuing to work with this subcommittee, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and the entire Congress to ensure the success of all generations of veterans through education.



Jared Lyon, President & CEO



Jared Lyon was appointed President and CEO of Student Veterans of America (SVA) on January 4, 2016, overseeing all aspects of the organization. He initially joined the professional staff of SVA in 2014 as the chief development officer and executive vice president of operations. In this role Jared forged critical partnerships and secured record grant funding for SVA. Named National Student Veteran of the Year by SVA in 2011, Lyon has come full circle to lead the organization he credits with his educational success.

Before joining SVA, Lyon was the national program manager at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University (SU) for the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV) and EBV-Families (EBV-F), providing small business management and entrepreneurship instruction free of charge in workshops held at eight universities annually.

A veteran of the U.S. Navy, Lyon served as a submariner and diver, taking part in multiple deployments around the world in support of the Global War on Terrorism. Upon leaving the Navy with an honorable discharge, he worked for Northrop Grumman Corporation in Melbourne, Florida as an electronic systems administrator while completing his associate's degree at Brevard Community College. He then managed Florida operations for the Washington Nationals Major League Baseball team for three seasons.

Lyon returned to higher education, earning a Bachelor of Science degree from Florida State University (FSU) in December 2011. As an undergraduate he served as president of both the school's SVA chapter and Sigma Phi Epsilon National Fraternity chapter. He was a founder and co-chairman of the Student Veteran Film Festival, and served on the search committee to identify a Veterans Center Director for FSU.

Lyon holds a Master of Public Administration (MPA) from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, where he is an adjunct professor at the Whitman School of Management. He continues to serve as a board member of the Florida State University Student Veterans Film Festival and Veterans Center Advisory Board.



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 2015, nor has it received any federal grants in the two previous Fiscal Years.



Appendix

SVA 2015 Census Survey – Student Veterans and Childcare

TABLE: 2015 Census Survey Student Veteran Breakdown by Relationship Status

What is your current relationship status?	Frequency	Percentage
Single, Never married	406	30.19%
Married	607	45.13%
Engaged, In a committed relationship	127	9.44%
Separated	20	1.49%
Divorced	163	12.12%
Widowed	5	0.37%
Decline to state	17	1.26%
Total	1,345	100.00%

TABLE: 2015 Census Survey Student Veteran Breakdown by Parental Status

Do you have any children (natural children, adopted children, or stepchildren)?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	621	46.14%
No	711	52.82%
Decline to State	14	1.04%
Total	1,346	100.00%

TABLE: 2015 Census Survey Student Veteran Breakdown by Single Parent Status

Do you consider yourself a single parent?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	91	14.70%
No	523	84.49%
Decline to state	5	0.81%
Total	619	100.00%



TABLE: 2015 Census Survey Student Veteran Breakdown by Childcare Status Impact on Academic Goals

What type of impact does your current childcare status have on your progress towards academic goal?	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely negative	7	2.17%
Negative	56	17.39%
Neither positive or negative	119	36.96%
Positive	86	26.71%
Extremely positive	54	16.77%
Total	322	100.00%

TABLE: 2015 Census Survey Student Veteran Breakdown by Childcare Status on Overall Life

What type of impact does your current childcare status have on your overall life?	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely negative	5	1.56%
Negative	26	8.13%
Neither positive or negative	128	40.00%
Positive	93	29.06%
Extremely positive	68	21.25%
Total	320	100.00%

TABLE: 2015 Census Survey Student Veteran Breakdown by Childcare Status Impact on Budget

What type of impact does your current childcare status have on your budget	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely negative	56	17.39%
Negative	106	32.92%
Neither positive or negative	93	28.88%
Positive	36	11.18%
Extremely positive	31	9.63%



Total	322	100.00%
TABLE: 2015 Census Survey Student Veteran Breakdown by Stress Due to Scheduling Childcare		
How much stress does scheduling childcare add to your life?	Frequency	Percentage
None	89	27.55%
Minor	93	28.79%
Moderate	77	23.84%
Serious	38	11.76%
Not Applicable	26	8.05%
Total	323	100.00%

TABLE: 2015 Census Survey Student Veteran Breakdown by Stress due to Paying for Childcare		
How much stress does paying for childcare add to your life?	Frequency	Percentage
None	87	27.02%
Minor	43	13.35%
Moderate	76	23.60%
Serious	86	26.71%
Not Applicable	30	9.32%
Total	322	100.00%

TABLE: 2015 Census Survey Student Veteran Breakdowns by Stress due to Travel to and from Childcare		
How much stress does travel to and from childcare add to your life?	Frequency	Percentage
None	109	33.96%
Minor	81	25.23%
Moderate	78	24.30%
Serious	25	7.79%
Not Applicable	28	8.72%



Total	321	100.00%
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TABLE: 2015 Census Survey Student Veteran Breakdown by Current Enrollment Status

What is your current enrollment status?	Frequency	Percentage
Full-time Student	1,138	84.17%
Part-Time Student	211	15.61%
Not currently enrolled/LOA	0	0.00%
Graduated/Alum	0	0.00%
Enrolled, Full-Time/Part-Time Unknown	3	0.22%
Total	1,352	100.00%