



**STATEMENT**

**OF**

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SENIOR POLICY ASSOCIATE  
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THE AMERICAN LEGION**

**BEFORE THE**

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

**ON**

**PENDING AND DRAFT LEGISLATION**

**JUNE 12, 2024**

<b>LEGISLATION</b>	<b>POSITION</b>
H.R. 7543 - Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2024	<b>Support</b>
H.R. 8560 - End Veterans Homelessness Act of 2024	<b>Support</b>
H.R.7920 - AG VETS Act	<b>Support</b>
Draft Legislation - Warriors to Workforce Act	<b>Support</b>
H.R.7896 - VETS Opportunity Act of 2024	<b>Support</b>
Draft Legislation - Modernizing the Veterans On-Campus Experience Act of 2024	<b>Support</b>
Draft Legislation - Reforming Education for Veterans Act	<b>Support</b>
Draft Legislation - Student Veteran Relief Act of 2024	<b>Support</b>
Draft Legislation - VA Home Loan Program Reform Act	<b>Support</b>
Draft Legislation - VA Housing Loan Forever Act of 2024	<b>Support with Amendments</b>

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Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished members of this committee, on behalf of National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer and more than 1.5 million dues-paying members of The American Legion, we thank you for the opportunity to offer this statement for the record on pending and draft legislation.

The American Legion is directed by active Legionnaires who dedicate their time and resources to serve veterans, servicemembers, their families, and caregivers. As a resolutions-based organization, our positions are guided by more than 105 years of advocacy and resolutions that originate at the grassroots level of our organization. Every time The American Legion testifies, we offer a direct voice from the veteran community to Congress.

**H.R. 7543 – Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2024**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to expand eligibility for Post-9/11 Educational Assistance to members of the National Guard and Reserve who perform certain full-time duty, and for other purposes.*

From protecting borders and capitals to delivering pandemic aid and supporting local law enforcement, National Guard and Reserve servicemembers have been increasingly called upon to confront unique challenges. Often, they leave their families and civilian employers for sizable periods, sometimes taking significant pay cuts. Yet, despite all we ask of them, they are often denied a cornerstone benefit of service: the GI Bill.

As it stands, Guardsmen and Reservists only earn credit toward Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits when they mobilize and deploy for federal missions. H.R. 7543, the Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2024, seeks to remedy this by counting every day spent on weekend drills, annual training, attending military school, participating in an exercise, or responding to a disaster toward GI Bill eligibility.

Through American Legion Resolution No. 24: *GI Bill Fairness for Activated National Guard and Reserve Servicemembers*,<sup>1</sup> we support counting every day in uniform towards GI Bill benefits and encourage Congress to pass this legislation.

**The American Legion supports the *Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2024* as currently written.**

### **H.R. 8560 - End Veterans Homelessness Act of 2024**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, and the United States Housing Act of 1937, to make certain improvements to the supported housing program for veterans commonly known as ‘HUD–VASH.’*

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimates that more than 40,000 veterans experience homelessness on any given night. Roughly twice as many will experience homelessness over the course of a year.<sup>2</sup> The HUD-VASH program is a joint effort that combines HUD’s Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) for veterans with case management and clinical services for the VA.<sup>3</sup> This program has successfully served more than 170,000 veterans between 2008 and 2021.<sup>4</sup>

This bill is a comprehensive effort to enhance the existing HUD-VASH program and proposes several fundamental changes. It aims to streamline case management by prioritizing vulnerable veterans, particularly those with disabilities such as chronic mental illness, substance abuse disorders, or physical disabilities. It also advocates for an annual report of HUD-VASH, which would provide detailed information on the veterans served, the qualifications of case managers, the services provided, and the use of housing vouchers. Additionally, the bill suggests amendments to HUD-VASH, including clarifying rental assistance for homeless or at-risk veterans and ensuring that veterans who decline case management are not penalized. Lastly, the bill mandates that GAO submit a report to Congress detailing demographic information of veterans served, assessments of case management services, and metrics on housing stability for veterans in federal housing assistance programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution No. 24: GI Bill Fairness for Activated National Guard and Reserve Servicemembers: <https://archive.legion.org/node/14062>

<sup>2</sup> “Ahar Reports - Hud Exchange.” [hudexchange.info](https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/ahar/). Accessed May 29, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> “Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) - PIH.” [HUD.gov](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/vash). Accessed May 29, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Bell, Spencer. “HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program Overview.” [2021 National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. 2021 04-07 VASH-Vouchers.pdf \(nlihc.org\)](https://www.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/2021-04-07_VASH-Vouchers.pdf).

Through Resolution No. 357: *Mandatory Funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Homeless Program*.<sup>5</sup> and Resolution No. 332: *Support Funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Homeless Program*,<sup>6</sup> the American Legion reiterates its call for Congress to act immediately to improve the HUD-VASH Program, affirming its unwavering commitment to serving homeless veterans.

**The American Legion supports H.R. 8560 *End Veterans Homelessness Act of 2024* as currently written.**

### **H.R. 7920 - AG VETS Act**

*To amend the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 to direct the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a program under which the Secretary will award competitive grants to eligible entities for the purpose of establishing and enhancing farming and ranching opportunities for veterans.*

Agriculture producers find it difficult to hire enough workers to meet their labor needs and increasingly rely on foreign workers through the H-2A guest worker program.<sup>7</sup> Rising labor costs also contribute to the labor shortage in the agricultural industry. Additionally, the average age of an American farmer is 57 and is on the rise.<sup>8</sup> Given this, it is important to foster a younger generation of farmers. Veterans, being solid additions to any labor force, could help mediate this shortage with targeted training and awareness of these opportunities. Veterans tend to be reliable, hardworking, team players in civilian jobs; however, it can be difficult for veterans to determine their path post-military service and how their experiences can transfer to other career fields.<sup>9</sup>

This bill recognizes veterans' potential in agriculture and directs the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a grant program to establish and enhance farming and ranching opportunities for veterans.

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<sup>5</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 357: Mandatory funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Veterans Affairs (VA) Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Homeless Program: <https://archive.legion.org/node/231>

<sup>6</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 332: Support Funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Homeless Program: <https://archive.legion.org/node/480>

<sup>7</sup> Halvorson, Jodi. "2022 Census of Agriculture Impacts the next Generations of Farmers." usda.gov, February 22, 2023. <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2023/02/22/2022-census-agriculture-impacts-next-generations-farmers>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> "Veterans Employment Toolkit." VA.gov, March 26, 2014. [https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em\\_challengesreadjust.asp](https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_challengesreadjust.asp).

This program will award competitive grants to eligible entities, which include land-grant colleges or universities, non-land grant colleges of agriculture, Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges or universities, State departments of agriculture, nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, or a combination of two or more eligible entities. If awarded the funds, these eligible entities will use them to provide targeted training and classroom education that gives veterans a comprehensive understanding of farm and ranch business operations and management practices.

By equipping veterans with the necessary skills and knowledge, veterans will have access to new career opportunities. With this training and education, veterans can effectively contribute to the agricultural labor force, subsequently reducing the labor shortage.

Through American Legion Resolutions No. 318: *Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education*<sup>10</sup>, No. 296: *Support the Development of Veterans On-The-Job Training Opportunities*,<sup>11</sup> and No. 25: *Support and Expand Apprenticeship Opportunities for Servicemembers*.<sup>12</sup> The American Legion is supportive of expanding education, job opportunities, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships for veterans. Awarding grants to entities that provide veterans with targeted training and classroom education will lead to more opportunities.

**The American Legion supports H.R. 7920 *The AG VETS Act* as currently written.**

### **Draft Legislation - Warriors to Workforce Act**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the amount of educational assistance paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to an eligible individual during the first year of a full-time program of apprenticeship or other on-job training.*

Currently, the U.S. Code provides educational assistance for eligible veterans in education programs that do not lead to a degree, such as on-the-job training and apprenticeships. Eligible veterans can receive 80 percent of the monthly basic allowance for housing payable during the second six-month period of the program. This percentage of aid then decreases by 20 percent each proceeding six-month period.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 318: Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education: <https://archive.legion.org/node/470>

<sup>11</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 296: Support the development of veterans on-the-job training opportunities: <https://archive.legion.org/node/215>

<sup>12</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 25: Support and Expand Apprenticeship Opportunities for Servicemembers: <https://archive.legion.org/node/3437>

<sup>13</sup> 38 U.S. Code § 3313 - Educational Assistance: Amount; Payment.” Legal Information Institute. Accessed May 29, 2024:

Housing costs are the most significant burdens for veterans pursuing apprenticeships and on-the-job training as part of their transition to civilian life. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, 63% of qualified veterans reported that the monthly housing stipend did not cover all housing costs.<sup>14</sup> This bill seeks to increase the monthly basic housing allowance paid by the VA to eligible individuals during the first year of a full-time apprenticeship or other on-the-job training program. If enacted, it would increase the assistance for the second and sixth-month period from 80% to 90%. More support in housing assistance lowers the burden for veterans and, ideally, eliminates housing costs as a reason for dropping out of these programs and apprenticeships.

With Resolution No. 296: *Support the Development of Veterans On-The-Job Training Opportunities*.<sup>15</sup> The American Legion led the design and passage of the original GI Bill and therefore has a long history of supporting education for veterans. Education includes programs that do not lead to a degree, such as apprenticeships and on-the-job training. Any effort to expand benefits, including housing assistance for veterans' education, aligns with The American Legion's goals; thus, The American Legion strongly encourages Congress to pass the Warriors to Workforce Act.

**The American Legion supports the draft legislation *Warriors to Workforce Act* as currently written.**

### **H.R.7896 - VETS Opportunity Act of 2024**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to modify the criteria for approval of certain independent study programs for purposes of the educational assistance programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs.*

Similarly to the original GI Bill, the Post-9/11 GI Bill provides veterans who served at least 90 days on or after September 11, 2001, with benefits to help them pay for school or job training.<sup>16</sup> According to Veterans Employment and Education Commission Chairman John Bowen Sr., "The Post-9/11 GI Bill does not adequately benefit veterans enrolled in partially online certificate

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<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/38/3313#:~:text=The%20Secretary%20shall%20pay%20to%20each%20individual%20entitled,costs%20for%20pursuit%20of%20such%20program%20of%20education.>

<sup>14</sup> Bhattarai, R., Brees, S., & Oliff, P. (2023, June 20). Many student veterans must borrow or work to cover housing costs. The Pew Charitable Trusts. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2023/06/20/many-student-veterans-must-borrow-or-work-to-cover-housing-costs>

<sup>15</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 296: Support the development of veterans on-the-job training opportunities: <https://archive.legion.org/node/215>

<sup>16</sup> "Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33)." VA.gov. Accessed May 29, 2024. <https://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/post-9-11/>.

(skilled trade) programs offered by all higher education institutions.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, there is an ongoing skilled labor shortage throughout the country.<sup>18</sup>

The Post-9/11 GI Bill fails to adequately benefit veterans in hybrid versions of skilled trade training programs. This bill would extend educational benefits in the Post-9/11 GI Bill for veterans enrolled in hybrid certificate programs offered by higher education institutions; these hybrid programs teach in-demand skilled trades.

Endorsed by the American Legion through Resolution No. 14: *Preserve Housing Benefits for Online Education*<sup>19</sup>, we urge Congress to expand the Post-9/11 GI Bill to better support veterans in hybrid versions of skilled trade training programs.

**The American Legion supports the *VETS Opportunity Act of 2024* as currently written.**

### **Draft Legislation - Modernizing the Veterans On-Campus Experience Act of 2024**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements to the provision of on-campus educational and vocational counseling by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.*

Historically, on-campus educational and vocational counseling has suffered from a lack of qualified personnel. Additionally, those who may be qualified are administratively burdened by the number of students being served at any given time, leading to a disparity in the services provided to veterans on campus.

Educational and vocational counselors lack the qualifications to adequately serve the student-veteran community. Furthermore, counselors are inundated with requests from student-veterans, creating a significant gap in the services provided.

This bill seeks to improve the provision of on-campus educational and vocational counseling by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It requires that counselors must not only be employees of the VA but also hold a bachelor’s degree or higher in a relevant field of study. It also allows counselors to provide services on multiple campuses. Finally, it stipulates that counselors may not provide services to more than 25 individuals at any time. This bill will improve the education outcomes for veterans by strengthening the on-campus counseling offered by the VA.

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<sup>17</sup> “Ciscomani Introduces New Effort to Expand Veterans’ Access to Skilled Trade Educational Programs.” [ciscomani.house.gov](https://ciscomani.house.gov/media/press-releases/ciscomani-introduces-new-effort-expand-veterans-access-skilled-trade), April 9, 2024: <https://ciscomani.house.gov/media/press-releases/ciscomani-introduces-new-effort-expand-veterans-access-skilled-trade>.

<sup>18</sup> “Despite Rising Salaries, the Skilled-Labor Shortage Is Getting Worse.” PBS.org, 2021. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/despite-rising-salaries-the-skilled-labor-shortage-is-getting-worse>.

<sup>19</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 14: Preserve Housing Benefits for Online Education: <https://archive.legion.org/node/15089>



Through Resolution No. 318: *Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education*<sup>20</sup> and Resolution No. 343: *Support Student-Veterans Return-On-Investment Education Outcomes*,<sup>21</sup> The American Legion supports improving outcomes for student-veterans and urges Congress to pass this legislation. We believe that ensuring qualified personnel administer educational and vocational services on campus will lead to better outcomes and the overall success of the counselor and veteran.

**The American Legion supports the *Modernizing the Veterans On-Campus Experience Act of 2024* as currently written.**

### **Draft Legislation - Reforming Education for Veterans Act**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements to the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs relating to educational assistance, and for other purposes.*

Academic institutions have varying guidelines regarding course completion for active duty, Guard, and Reserve servicemembers when called to service. If these student service members receive military orders, their academic success could be at risk, depending on the institution's guidelines. Due to this disparity, servicemembers and veterans face ambiguity regarding their academic status upon receiving military orders.

There is often no recourse for these individuals who must depart mid-semester. Subsequently, they must disenroll without assurance that their benefits will remain intact. Additionally, the School Certifying Officials (SCO) who serve these individuals are often unaware of regulatory changes administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This creates a disconnect between the SCO, servicemember, and the VA, creating unnecessary burdens for all parties involved.

This bill seeks to reform and standardize veterans' education in several ways: First, it allows servicemembers seeking an education to withdraw, take a leave of absence, or otherwise come to an agreement with the institution if they receive orders to enter a period of covered service. Second, it requires the VA to allow educational institutions with multiple campuses to file only one compliance survey. Last, if the VA updates its official handbook, it must notify all school certifying officials. These reforms will improve the protection of education benefits and simplify the reporting process for SCOs and institutions, which ensures better outcomes.

Under Resolution No. 318: *Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education*,<sup>22</sup> The American Legion urges Congress to pass

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<sup>20</sup> American, Legion, Resolution No. 318: Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education: <https://archive.legion.org/node/470>

<sup>21</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 343: Support Student-Veterans Return-On-Investment Education Outcomes: <https://archive.legion.org/node/491>

<sup>22</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 318: Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education: <https://archive.legion.org/node/470>

legislation that improves access and protection to educational opportunities for servicemembers and veterans.

**The American Legion supports the *Reforming Education for Veterans Act* as currently written.**

### **Draft Legislation - Student Veteran Relief Act of 2024**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to modify certain requirements relating to the recovery by the Department of Veterans Affairs of over-payments made to eligible persons or veterans relating to educational assistance under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.*

Veterans have access to various education benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). As a sizeable bureaucratic department, the VA is adequately situated to bear responsibility for overpayments to veterans – the recovery of which can place immense financial stress on the veteran.<sup>23</sup>

This bill aims to alleviate the financial burden and stress associated with overpayment recovery for veterans pursuing education. It does so by first stipulating that overpayments will not be made a liability for veterans if it were due to a VA error or incorrect information from the Department of Defense. This bill also includes a provision for a “hardship” waiver if the liability for the overpayment would prevent a veteran from continuing their education. Finally, this bill stipulates that the VA Secretary must establish a payment plan for the veteran if an overpayment cannot be recovered.

By Resolution No. 228: *Timely Processing of Overpayments for Reserve Components and/or Active Duty Pay*<sup>24</sup> and Resolution No. 59: *Automatic Waiver for Over-Payment Of \$300 Or less*,<sup>25</sup> The American Legion supports fairness regarding the VA’s processing of overpayments. This bill will mitigate undue financial hardship that a VA overpayment would cause to veterans.

**The American Legion supports the *Student Veteran Relief Act of 2024* as currently written.**

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<sup>23</sup> The American Legion. “Legion Testifies on the Prevention, Management of VA Overpayments.” The American Legion, October 26, 2017. <https://www.legion.org/legislative/239752/legion-testifies-prevention-management-va-overpayments>.

<sup>24</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 228: Timely Processing of Overpayments for Reserve Components and/or Active Duty Pay: <https://archive.legion.org/node/423>

<sup>25</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 59: Automatic Waiver for Over-Payment of \$300 or Less: <https://archive.legion.org/node/572>

## **Draft Legislation - VA Home Loan Program Reform Act**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to take certain actions to prevent or resolve a default of a housing loan guaranteed by the Secretary, and for other purposes.*

Many veterans still face foreclosure because of the pandemic's impacts. Additional resources provided through this bill will alleviate problems of delinquency and allow veterans to remain in their homes without fear of foreclosure. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lingering financial burdens affecting over 40,000 veterans, there is a significant risk of payment delinquency.

This bill authorizes the VA Secretary to take actions to prevent or resolve a default on a housing loan guaranteed by the VA. This can take the form of paying the loan holder, securing interest in the property covered by the loan, and requiring the holder to take necessary actions. The VA can also intervene with a new “partial claim program,” where the Secretary can make a partial claim on a loan at an imminent risk of default. Finally, the Secretary must submit a strategy within 90 days of this law’s enactment to ensure veterans seeking to purchase a home with a guaranteed loan are not disadvantaged when securing real estate representation.

Based upon Resolution No. 8: *Home Loan Guaranty Program Eligibility*,<sup>26</sup> The American Legion supports legislation that helps veterans seeking a home and, therefore, any administrative or legislative effort to make this process easier for veterans. This bill aims to improve the VA Home Loan Program, which the American Legion explicitly supports.

**The American Legion supports the VA Home Loan Program Reform Act as currently written.**

## **Draft Legislation - VA Housing Loan Forever Act of 2024**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain legatees of certain veterans eligible for housing loans guaranteed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.*

Historically, veterans from marginalized groups faced discrimination in accessing their earned GI Bill Home Loan benefits. Many World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam War veterans were never permitted to use their earned benefits – particularly the home loan benefit.

This draft legislation will authorize veterans who served between 1944 and 1977 to transfer unused VA Home Loan eligibility to their surviving spouse, child, grandchild, and certain direct descendants, to fully honor commitments made in the original GI Bill and address historic

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<sup>26</sup> American Legion, Resolution No. 8: Home Loan Guaranty Program Eligibility: <https://archive.legion.org/node/15012>

economic inequities for the families of minority veterans who served during and after World War II.

The American Legion supports this draft legislation with the following amendments:

- (a) Deletion of page 5 line 17 “(3) a grandchild; and”
- (b) Deletion of page 5 line 18 “(4) and other direct descendant.”

Based upon Resolution No. 8: *Home Loan Guaranty Program Eligibility*,<sup>27</sup> the American Legion supports legislation that expands VA Home Loan eligibility to veterans’ dependents. However, the resolution does not currently support the expansion of the VA Home Loan Guaranty Program to “grandchildren and any other direct descendants.” We believe the transfer of VA Home Loan eligibility to dependents will produce advantages for veterans and their families, and all veterans should have the privilege and equal opportunity to enjoy this benefit in any way they choose, including transferring it to their dependents.

**The American Legion supports the *VA Housing Loan Forever Act of 2024* with amendments.**

### **Conclusion**

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, The American Legion thanks you for your leadership and for allowing us to explain our members' positions on the importance of this proposed legislation. Questions concerning this testimony can be directed to Patrick Johnston, Legislative Associate, at (202) 263-2988 or pjohnston@legion.org.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.