

House of Representatives, Committee on Veteran Affairs, and Congressman Van Orden,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on my behalf in regard to my transition from the military to my civilian life. I would like to first explain that I am an almost 17 year veteran of the worlds greatest Air Force. Most of my career has been as an Air National Guard member. I have always worn two hats; my military cover, and my civilian life. They both coexist with one another.

My transition to using my educational military benefits was a challenge for myself. For most your entire young life into adulthood is controlled by someone else. They help to make the decision of your day-to-day life. When you join the military, you are shifting it from a family members job to help you decide to the military making those decisions for you. They set your day for you based on what is best for the mission. When I was given the opportunity post training, I immediately enrolled into WTC for school. I had no idea what I was doing. I just kept hearing "this is your opportunity, take it and run with it." And in the ideal world of knowing exactly what you want that would've worked out perfectly. I spent 2 years using my GI Bill for a career that I don't think I ever wanted. I then proceeded to continue to use it at a 4-year university with the same outcome.

It wasn't until my first deployment in 2012 that I had time to sit and think, in a once again extremely structured environment, that I found what my forever idea was. After I returned, I continued to another 4-year school and completed my bachelor's degree. One of the main benefits that the military will use as a recruiting tool is "your school is paid for." And that statement is correct if you have the proper guidance to ensure it is used correctly.

Here I sit an almost 17-year veteran, with over \$30,000 in student loan debt. I am very grateful for the opportunity to serve my county and do what I am doing, but it would've been nice to have better guidance when I was younger. They always say "once you get older you will understand." I know fully understand the need for proper assistance when someone is beginning the chapter for their educational benefits.

I would like to thank you for your time and listening to my life experience.