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TESTIMONY OF
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STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

BEFORE THE

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

LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON THE TOPICS OF:
"TRANSITION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY"

MAY 23, 2018



Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting Student Veterans of America (SVA) to submit our testimony on the pending legislation related to veteran transition and economic opportunity. With more than 1,500 chapters representing the more than 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 and some of the most successful students in higher education, fostering the success of veterans in school is paramount to their preparation for productive and impactful lives.¹

Edward Everett, our nation's 20th Secretary of State, and the former President of Harvard University was famously quoted as stating, "Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army." While we have the finest military that the world has ever known, the sentiment remains; the importance of education to our nation's national security continues to be critical. Today, we will discuss several topics up for consideration in front of this body.

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H.R. 5452, Reduce Unemployment for Veterans of All Ages Act

This bill proposes to eliminate the current twelve-year period of eligibility for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program.

VR&E has been an important component of veterans' reintegration since Congress instituted a veterans' benefits system upon U.S. entry into World War I in 1917.² It also remains one of the top areas of discussion when we talk with student veterans across the country, as highlighted in a recent oversight hearing before this committee³.

Last summer, thanks largely to this committee, the Forever GI Bill removed the fifteen-year eligibility window for the Post-9/11 GI Bill and made it a benefit of service no longer tied to a specific conflict.⁴ We see a similar intent in this legislation, which would provide greater access to rehabilitation and employment services empowering the economic opportunity potential of eligible veterans.

SVA generally supports the intent to expand the VR&E program beyond the current twelve-year window as a means to simplify program eligibility, which currently provides an often-confusing and arbitrary number of reasons to extend the twelve-year window. However, we have concerns on expanding the current VR&E program without a comprehensive program review, a resolution to the IT system concerns, and sufficient funding to meet the current and potential program participation and administration costs, as discussed in previous testimony before

¹ Shane, Leo. Military Times. *Report: Young vets are more successful than their civilian peers*. July 29, 2017.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/veterans/2017/07/29/report-young-vets-are-more-successful-than-their-civilian-peers/>

² Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, *The Independent Budget – Veterans Agenda for the 115th Congress (Policy Recommendations for Congress and the Administration)*, 120, http://www.independentbudget.org/2018/FY18_IB.pdf (last visited Apr. 30, 2018).

³ Vangellow, Cassandra. Testimony for Oversight Hearing on the Topic of "A Review of VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program." May 17, 2018, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, <https://veterans.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=2160>.

⁴ Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2017 §108. Pub. L 115-48. (2017). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3218>.



this committee⁵. We look forward to continuing to work with this committee on this issue and welcome additional conversations on how to achieve a stronger VR&E program.

H.R. 5538, Reserve Component Vocational Rehabilitation Parity Act

This bill would add additional mobilization codes used by the Department of Defense (DoD) to 38 U.S.C. 3105(e)(2) (Title 38).

The section of Title 38 amended in this bill applies to the discontinuation of VR&E subsistence allowance payments when Reserve component service members are called to active duty. While most mobilization codes are already listed, SVA supports the inclusion of the additional codes – 12304a and 12304b – to address gaps in benefit administration caused by bureaucratic nuances.

We believe this builds on the efforts to rectify inequities in benefit and program administration included as part of the Forever GI Bill, which added additional mobilization codes for the purposes of calculating Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit eligibility.⁶ In addition to considering this specific language, we encourage the inclusion of all mobilization orders in future legislation or regulation to proactively reduce similar unintentional bureaucratic discrepancies in benefit and program administration.

H.R. 5644, Veterans' Education, Transition, and Opportunity Prioritization Plan Act of 2018

The *Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration Act of 2018*, or VET OPP Act, would establish an Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity at VA, aligning the programs in the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) presently under the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) into a distinct lane within VA known as the Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) previously expressed publicly that, “Economic competitiveness isn’t just about employment; it encompasses overall employment, wealth, independent living, housing, career mobility and educational attainment. VA is proud to work alongside employment experts at the Department of Labor and policy leaders in DoD to ensure we are in alignment with relevant trends and services they offer to transitioning service members and veterans.”⁷ With economic opportunity as a stated priority of VA, we strongly support the establishment of an Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity at VA, who would report directly to the Secretary. Responsibilities of this new division at VA would include the administration of housing loan guaranty and related programs, vocational rehabilitation and employment (VR&E), education assistance programs, and transition programs (*see Appendix A for detailed division of applicable programs*).

At present, these programs are buried within the bureaucracy of VA and lack a true champion at the level of leadership these programs warrant. Over the past century, VA has evolved to focus on compensating veterans for loss, yet realities and advances of the 21st century and beyond demands the additional goal of empowering veterans to excel post-service. Importantly this will also advance our nation’s goals of enhancing economic competitiveness by focusing on veteran contributions to business and industry, communities, and preparing them through the best education programs in our country. To truly achieve “whole health” for veterans in the future economy, it is imperative we afford VA the opportunity to enrich the lives of veterans through the primacy of VA’s

⁵ Vangellow, Cassandra. Testimony for Oversight Hearing on the Topic of “A Review of VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program.” May 17, 2018, House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, <https://veterans.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=2160>.

⁶ Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2017 §108. Pub. L 115-48. (2017). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3218>.

⁷ Department of Veterans Affairs, “Understanding Economic Competitiveness in Relation to Their Non-Veteran Counterparts.” Accessed March 16, 2018. <https://www.data.va.gov/story/economic-opportunities-veterans>.



economic opportunity programs. During several recent House Committee on Veterans' Affairs hearings, we've articulated our commitment to elevating the economic opportunity programs at VA and identified the need to address a lack of resource-focus on economic opportunity programs within the greater scope of the overall VA budget.^{8, 9, 10}

This proposal would de-layer and simplify some of the bureaucracy of VA. It would limit the number of full-time employees to the current footprint of these programs, thereby curbing any expansion of government while still providing economic opportunity and transition programs an accountable champion. Functionally, it would convert the role of the Deputy Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity into a political appointment as an Under Secretary. The outcomes would be numerous::

- **Increases Accountability.** As of this hearing, there is currently no Deputy Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity. When Congress, other federal agencies, and external partners seek accountability, there is effectively nobody to "answer the mail." This proposal would provide for greater accountability and access to issues that empower veterans. It further prevents these issues from being reduced in priority; at present, VA has given no indication that there is any intention of filling the Deputy Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity role, effectively going the opposite direction of this proposal.
- **Elevates Economic Opportunity Issues.** Directly relevant to President Trump's Executive Order 13822, "Supporting Our Veterans during Their Transition from Uniformed Services to Civilian Life."¹¹ This proposal supports the importance of transition, education, employment, and well-being. Further, it sends a strong message to veterans and the American public that economic opportunity issues truly matter and are important enough to have the leadership of an Under Secretary. Giving a national voice to issues like home ownership, education, training, and employment is a critically important measure.
- **Reduces Bureaucracy.** Bureaucracy at VA has historically led to serious national challenges, and keeping economic opportunity issues buried at the bottom of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is not the answer. The lack of a clear response from VA on several basic questions regarding economic opportunity programs at recent hearings underscores the importance of leadership in this area and was a direct result of a structure not functioning to benefit the end user.¹² This proposal flattens the bureaucracy of VA in favor of the veteran, versus creating additional layers in the current "chain of command." One need only to review the recent budget submission to see the bureaucracy of VA is not conducive to resources being devoted to these issues consistent with the needs of veterans.¹³

⁸ Hubbard, William. Testimony for Legislative Hearing on the Topic of "Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1206, H.R. 3023, H.R. 3940, H.R. 4451, H.R. 4830, H.R. 4835, H.R. 5044, and a draft bill entitled, 'VA Home Loan Improvement Act of 2018'." March 20, 2018, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/VR/VR10/20180320/108011/HHRG-115-VR10-Wstate-HubbardW-20180320.pdf>.

⁹ Augustine, Lauren. Testimony for Legislative Hearing on the Topic of "U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Fiscal Year 2019 Budget: Veterans Benefits Administration and the Board of Veterans' Appeals." March 15, 2018, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittees on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, Economic Opportunity, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/VR/VR09/20180315/106968/HHRG-115-VR09-Wstate-AugustineL-20180315.pdf>.

¹⁰ Vangellow, Cassandra. Testimony for Oversight Hearing on the Topic of "A Review of VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program." May 17, 2018, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, <https://veterans.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=2160>.

¹¹ Executive Order 13822. *Supporting Our Veterans During Their Transition From Uniformed Service to Civilian Life*. January 9, 2018. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/01/12/2018-00630/supporting-our-veterans-during-their-transition-from-uniformed-service-to-civilian-life>

¹² In a House Veterans Affairs Committee budget hearing on March 15, 2018, when asked to provide an approximation of how much time is spent focusing on each division of the Veterans Benefits Administration, senior VA leadership shared, "I don't know if I could answer that correctly"; panel members representing VA were unable to provide a clear response as to the purpose of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program; several additional responses to Member questions failed to provide informative replies.

¹³ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Budget. FY 2019 Budget Submission. <https://www.va.gov/budget/products.asp>



- **Establishes Direct Counterpart.** The Department of Labor (DoL) and the Department of Defense (DoD) presently lack a direct counterpart within VA for the programs that overlap the agencies and any significant initiative must achieve multiple layers of approval before moving ahead. This proposal provides DoD and DoL with a political appointee who can move important programs into the modern age, while supporting their missions more broadly for positive, holistic cross-agency solutions.
- **Supports “Whole Health.”** A tragically elastic narrative exists around veterans as either “broken or damaged.” In reality, the vast majority of veterans are like many other Americans—hard-working, community-oriented neighbors who want what’s best for their families. Creation of an Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity will empower veterans to be successful as they transition through improved education programs and better employment opportunities. One of the major challenges facing veterans today is “transition stress,” an issue an Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity would be keen to address.¹⁴ With better service and stronger outcomes, more veterans will be apt to “Choose VA.”

Voices of opposition to the importance of elevating these issues through the creation of an Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity exist. Their concerns have been over “increased resource costs and creation of redundant roles.” Interestingly, the proposal would achieve the exact opposite effect. With a capped footprint, no significant increase in costs should occur as our proposal intends, unless the implementation at VA diverges from the concept’s intent. Others have cited giving current leaders at VA the chance to address and elevate these issues through their own work. This viewpoint is misguided and short-sighted; personality-dependent success is not a long-term solution to these structural challenges.

When previously introduced in the 114th Congress, veterans’ organizations came out in force to support the fourth administration concept, including The Disabled American Veterans (DAV), The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), The American Legion, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA).¹⁵ Today, the current proposal further simplifies the concept of a Veteran Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration by having no intention of statutorily affecting the DoL VETS program, a valued partner for transition and employment programs like VR&E. Additional veterans’ organizations have stepped up to share their support for the current concept including: The Travis Manion Foundation (TMF), The Mission Continues, The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA), High Ground Veterans Advocacy, and Veteran Education Success (VES). The Independent Budget, an authoritative annual presentation of recommended funding levels produced by American Veterans (AMVETS), DAV, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), and VFW has called for this change for years.¹⁶ While some prefer the status quo, we recognize that bold initiatives are required to ensure our country delivers the best outcomes possible for veterans.

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) makes a compelling argument for restructuring VA in a piece titled, “Economic Opportunity, Transition Assistance, and the 21st-Century Veteran: The Case for a Fourth VA Administration.”¹⁷ Their research demonstrates that legislative language related to veterans creates a powerful and sustained narrative related to this population; notably, language consistent with a “deficit model,” or words such as ‘broken’, ‘wounded’, ‘helpless’, etc., damages overall perceptions of this population wreaking further havoc on a wider audience of veterans. Conversely, language consistent with an “asset model,” such as ‘civic asset,’ ‘successful,’ ‘leaders,’ etc., has the effect of improving the likelihood of achieving positive transition and

¹⁴ Clark, James. *For Most Vets, PTSD Isn't the Problem, 'Transition Stress' Is. Here's What It Means*, January 25, 2018, <http://taskandpurpose.com/what-is-transition-stress/>

¹⁵ United States. Cong. House. Committee on Veterans Affairs. *Legislative Hearing on H.R. 356; H.R. 832; H.R. 1994; H.R. 2133; H.R. 2275; H.R. 2344; H.R. 2360; H.R. 2361; and a draft bill. Hearings, June 2, 2007*. 114th Cong. 1st sess.

¹⁶ The Independent Budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs Budget (FY2012), 112th Congress, http://www.independentbudget.org/2012/IB_FY2012.pdf

¹⁷ Burgess, Rebecca. American Enterprise Institute (2018). “*Economic Opportunity, Transition Assistance, and the 21st-Century Veteran: The Case for a Fourth VA Administration*,” <http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Economic-Opportunity-Transition-Assistance-and-the-21st-Century-Veteran.pdf>.



long-range experiences. This proposal is strongly in favor of a positive narrative of veterans, as it proposes elevating issue areas the public widely views as empowering such as education, employment, home ownership, and others.

Several important questions related to this proposal are worth considering, including the specific programs within VA this will truly impact (*refer to Appendix A*); any effects on interagency partnerships with DoD, DoL, SBA, and others; and the opportunity this presents for greater public-private partnerships with the private sector including corporate America and academia. We encourage this committee to consider investing significant data authorities in this office to be able to effectively track—and one day predict—the true impact empowered veterans have on the country’s economic health. For example, it’s known that the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the original GI Bill, had an economic output of \$7 for every \$1 dollar invested in that program.¹⁸ Insights such as these will be vital to establishing the long-term understanding of these programs. Further, we recommend this office produce a consolidated annual report reviewing program efficacy, tracking key metrics tied to outcomes instead of outputs.

VA proudly cites the VA, “has a mission to help veterans maximize their economic competitiveness and thus, increase the number of economic opportunities for veterans and their families.”¹⁹ This proposal will maximize the notion that the VA publicly espouses in empowering veterans to lead successful lives. The 1996 Congressional Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance once stated, “If employment is the door to a successful transition to civilian life, education will be the key to employment in the information age.”²⁰ Future generations of veterans are counting on the success of this proposal, and we are eager to work with this Congress and President Trump in making it a reality.

H.R. 5649, Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William Bill Mulder (Ret.) Transition Improvement Act

During the past several years, we have studied the issue of transition from the military to civilian life in great depth. This testimony is the result of in-depth feedback from recently transitioned service members and a comprehensive review of the curriculum and process. The topic of transition is not limited to the delivery of Transition Assistance Program (TAP) seminars, but for the purposes of the proposed legislation, we will limit discussion to TAP.

The November 2017 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on TAP made it abundantly clear that serious gaps existed in the program. Originally implemented in 1991 after being established in the 1990 National Defense Reauthorization Act, TAP has gone through dozens of improvements throughout the years, including most recently this past winter.^{21,22, 23} The programs are vastly improved from prior iterations, though several important enhancements can be done to make the transition to civilian life significantly more impactful. This legislation proposes key changes that will positively impact overall outcomes for individuals separating from the military, including the sections identified below.

¹⁸ 100th United States Congress, Joint Economic Committee, Subcommittee on Education and Health of the Joint Economic Committee. “A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Government Investment in Post-Secondary Education Under the World War II GI Bill,” December 14, 1988.

¹⁹ Department of Veterans Affairs, *Understanding Economic Competitiveness in Relation to Their Non-Veteran Counterparts*. Accessed March 16, 2018. <https://www.data.va.gov/story/economic-opportunities-veterans>.

²⁰ <https://ntrl.ntis.gov/NTRL/dashboard/searchResults/titleDetail/PB2006113212.xhtml>

²¹ GAO, *TRANSITIONING VETERANS: DOD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program*, GAO 18-23, (Washington, D.C.; November 2017).

²² National Defense Reauthorization Act of 1990, Section 502, “Other Transition Benefits and Services.” <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-104/pdf/STATUTE-104-Pg1485.pdf>.

²³ Senior VA officials facilitated the opportunity for select participants from various veteran organizations to attend the pilot implementation of the new TAP curriculum related to VA benefits seminars I and II in January and February of 2018.



Pathways. This would require the military services to establish a minimum of three transition pathways to be used as part of the individualized counseling that military services would provide service members. Further, GAO would be required to complete a review of the design and implementation of these individualized pathways. Exiting service members would also receive a copy of their joint service transcript (JST) of training and military experience. This is an important improvement that will catalyze the success of separating service members and is a distinct shift from the current approach where individuals receive instruction almost exclusively and arbitrarily based on junior or senior rank.

Curriculum. The bill would improve and modernize the curriculum and structure of TAP by authorizing a service member to choose one of the two-day tracks to include as part of their five-day training, different from the current structure that has a mandated five-day course with optional additional two-day tracks. As identified in the November 2017 GAO report, the so-called “optional tracks” were significantly and detrimentally underutilized.²⁴ Despite being misleadingly labeled as “optional,” the information available through these tracks provides critical knowledge for the successful pursuit of post-military success. For example, the Accessing Higher Education module is best utilized with sufficient time to apply to school, and to enhance choice for veterans by providing them the best information on how to connect education to career and transition goals. Taken too late, the effectiveness of the module’s information is greatly diminished and may delay the service member’s attendance at a school by several semesters.²⁵

While we appreciate the mandate of these tracks, we have serious concerns they would replace, instead of supplement, the current five-day curriculum. Further, we encourage the committee to amend Section 102 subsection (f), subpart (D) to reflect the addition of “at least one” in the language, to read, “Two days of instruction regarding *at least one* topic selected by the member from the following subjects.” In some cases, taking several of these tracks in compliment may offer the separating service members a significant advantage as they exit the military, and they should have the opportunity to pursue several different tracks if deemed valuable.

Supporting Spouses. The bill would also reauthorize the off-base TAP pilot that was originally authorized by Section 301 of PL 112-260.²⁶ This pilot would authorize the teaching of the DoL employment workshop at off-base locations, such as local high schools, community centers, and other locations for veterans and their spouses. The proposal would authorize the program for an additional five years at a minimum of 50 locations across the country. This is an important recognition that access to the information in TAP seminars after separation for spouses and veterans can help improve the transition process. Indeed, when the family unit is successful, the transition process is vastly improved. We would further request this committee to consider including language that would encourage spouses to attend the on-base TAP seminars with their service member to improve the effectiveness of the program.

Community Impact. The bill proposes a five-year pilot program that would provide up to \$10 million in matching grant funds to help community providers fund innovative transition services such as résumé assistance, interview training, job recruitment training, and related services. The bill would prioritize funds for programs that operate as a community “hub” and a single point of contact for all services for one community, with organizations applying for funding in consultation with VA and DoL. Further, the bill proposes authorizing VA, in consultation with state entities that provide services to retired, separated, or discharged service members, to enter into a contract with a non-federal party to study and identify community providers who provide effective and efficient transition services

²⁴ GAO, *TRANSITIONING VETERANS: DOD Needs to Improve Performance Reporting and Monitoring for the Transition Assistance Program*, GAO 18-23, (Washington, D.C.; November 2017).

²⁵ Joint Knowledge Online, “Accessing Higher Education Module,” TGPS-US009. http://jko.jten.mil/courses/tap/TGPS%20Standalone%20Training/CourseWare/TGPS-US009_Standalone/launch.html.

²⁶ 112th Congress, PL 112-260, Section 301 “Off-base transition training for veterans and their spouses.” <https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ260/PLAW-112publ260.pdf>.



to service members. These initiatives appropriately recognize the importance of local communities in the transition process, and we applaud the acknowledgement of community-based impact.

Data and Research. Most importantly, this bill proposes a one-year independent assessment of the effectiveness of TAP, which would be performed no later than three months after the bill's enactment in consultation with VA, DoD, DoL, and SBA. The assessment would require the expertise of a third-party entity with experience in teaching adult learners to perform a comprehensive review of the entire military life cycle, career readiness standards, the definition of TAP, examination of service member feedback, and other data. Furthermore, the bill proposes a longitudinal study on the changes proposed to TAP, including a review of the Federal Directory of New Hires, the database used to track the employment outcomes of transitioning service members.

Finally, the bill proposes requiring DoD to provide an annual report to the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs and Armed Services on the number of service members who attend TAP and data on which of the tracks are being utilized. Each of these proposed components will provide further clarity on the overall impact of TAP and provide information that can be used to refine the program's effectiveness—we strongly applaud this committee for including each component and look forward to reviewing the information in years to come. One of the major flaws of TAP has been the lack of data and analysis on the outcomes of the program, and these studies will provide critical knowledge to fill the gaps. We propose a minor technical change to Section 205, subsection (a), subpart (5) to modify the language to read, "whether TAP effectively *supports* the families of veterans making the transition to civilian life;" versus the current language, "addresses the challenges faced by..."

Important improvements to TAP have been highlighted through participation in roundtables this committee hosted and as a leader of the "Pre-Separation" component of the joint VA-DoD Military-Civilian Transition (MCT) convenings over the past year. We are pleased to see a majority of these bold initiatives included in this transformational piece of legislation. We continue to emphasize the importance of providing transition information to service members as early as their recruitment into the military. We are proud to have worked with this committee and thank Chairman Arrington for his leadership on this topic.

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The success of veterans in higher education is no mistake or coincidence. Research consistently demonstrates this unique population of non-traditional students is far outpacing their peers in many measures of academic performance.²⁷ Further, this success in higher education begets success in careers, in communities, and promotes family financial stability, holistic well-being, and provides the all-volunteer force with powerful tools for recruitment and retention when recruits know military service prepares them for success after service. At our 10th annual national conference, the President and CEO of SVA, Jared Lyon, shared the story behind the quote on our anniversary challenge coin, "Some attribute the following text to Thucydides and others note that it's a paraphrase of a book written by Sir William Francis Butler from the late 1800's. The reality, either way, rings as true today as it ever has, and the phrase goes like this, 'The nation that makes a great distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools.'"²⁸

We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and the Committee 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 committee, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, and the entire Congress to ensure the success of all generations of veterans through education.

²⁷ 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*. Student Veterans of America, Washington, D.C., http://invest.studentveterans.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/NVEST-Report_FINAL.pdf.

²⁸ Jared Lyon, *Defining Our Future: Today's Scholars, Tomorrow's Leaders*, Jan. 5, 2018, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/defining-our-future-todays-scholars-tomorrows-leaders-jared-lyon>



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

Pursuant to Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, Student Veterans of America has not received any federal grants in Fiscal Year 2018, nor has it received any federal grants in the two previous Fiscal Years.



**Lauren Augustine,
Vice President of Government Affairs**

After graduating from Virginia Tech, Lauren enlisted in the U.S. Army, quickly rising to the rank of sergeant, and served 12 months in Iraq with the First Infantry Division. She has worked as a senior legislative associate for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, a legislative representative for the American Federation of Government Employees, and the director of government relations for Got Your 6.

In these positions she advocated on behalf of veterans, their families, and the services and benefits provided by the VA. In recognition of her advocacy work, Lauren was named to the HillVets Top 100 in 2015 and awarded the Excellence by An Up and Coming Practitioner award from the Women in Professional Advocacy in 2016. She was also appointed to the Joint Leadership Council of Veteran Service Organizations for the Commonwealth of Virginia by Governor McAuliffe in 2016.



APPENDIX A

Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity

Areas proposed to move to Economic Opportunity Administration:

Education Service: Administers VA's education programs that provide education and training benefits to eligible Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve Servicemembers, Veterans, and dependents.

Loan Guaranty Service: Provides oversight of the VA Guaranteed Home Loan Program that guarantees home loans in varying amounts. Ensures Veteran's rights are protected when purchasing a home under this program. Oversees administration of specially adapted housing grants for certain severely disabled Servicemembers and Veterans so they can adapt or acquire suitable housing.

Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) Service: Assists Servicemembers and Veterans with service-connected disabilities to prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable employment; start their own business; or receive independent-living services. Oversees their education and provides career counseling to help guide career paths and ensure the most effective use of VA benefits.

Employment and Economic Impact: The Office of Employment and Economic Impact is dedicated to helping transitioning Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families take advantage of the benefits they have earned to connect with meaningful careers and achieve long-term economic success; oversees transition assistance (*shifted from Benefits Assistance Service*).

Areas that would remain under Veterans Benefits Administration:

Compensation Service: Oversees the delivery of disability compensation, a tax-free monetary benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service.

Pension and Fiduciary Service: Provides program oversight that helps wartime Veterans, their families, and survivors with financial challenges by providing supplemental income through Veterans Pension, Death Pension, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. Protects the benefits paid to our most vulnerable beneficiaries who, because of disease, injury, or infirmities of advanced age, are unable to manage their VA benefits.

Insurance Service: Maintains life insurance programs that give financial security and peace of mind for Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families.

Benefits Assistance Service: Facilitates outreach, web/social media communications, and public contact services across the administration, and ensures quality and training for VBA employees who engage with Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families through client services such as the National Call Center.

Appeals Management Center: Processes most appeals that have been returned to VBA by the Board of Veterans Appeals.

Office of Business Process Integration: Ensures VBA's strategic needs and requirements for business and data systems are properly documented, integrated, and communicated.

Veterans Benefits Management System Program Office: Developing an end-to-end paperless claims processing system that incorporates improved business processes with technology.

Records Management Center: Houses most service treatment records forwarded by the Department of Defense (DoD) to VA.

Office of Field Operations: Provides operational oversight to over five district offices and 56 regional benefit offices within the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. The five district offices include the North Atlantic District, Philadelphia, PA; Southeast District, Nashville, TN; Midwest District, St. Louis, MO; Continental District, Lakewood, CO; and Pacific District, Phoenix, AZ.