

STATEMENT OF

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Before The

House Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

House Committee on Veterans Affairs

on

**Follow Up Oversight Hearing
on GI Bill Implementation**

September 24, 2008

Good afternoon Madam Chairwoman and members of the Subcommittee. I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the Department of Defense's role in the implementation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, as enacted in Public Law 110-252, and codified in Chapter 33, title 38, United States Code. There is little doubt that this new educational assistance program represents the most sweeping change in post-service education benefits since World War II.

The original "GI Bill of Rights," created at the end of World War II, gave returning Servicemembers a comprehensive package of benefits to compensate for opportunities lost while in the military, and to ease their transition back into civilian life. The noted economist, Peter Drucker, described that GI Bill by saying, "Future historians may consider it the most important event of the 20th century." Perhaps the most far-reaching provision of the GI Bill was the financial assistance it made available for veterans to attend college. The GI Bill offered returning Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen payment for tuition, fees, books, and supplies, along with a living stipend, at the educational institution of the veteran's choice. With over 7.8 million veterans receiving education or training, this landmark program changed the face of higher education, and many have said directly led to the creation of the American middle class.

Although there have been several GI Bills since the original, the Post 9/11 GI Bill is the first to directly mirror this original milestone program, again offering the returning Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen payment for tuition, fees, books, and supplies, along with a living stipend, at the educational institution of the veteran's choice. However, the original GI Bill was designed to ease the transition to civilian life from a conscripted military force during a massive drawdown. Today's military is much different -- since 1973 we have defended this nation with a volunteer force, and our military forces are growing, not drawing down. In recognition of this difference, the Post 9/11 GI Bill offers career Service members the opportunity to share or transfer their earned, but unused, education assistance benefits with their immediate family members. GI Bill transferability has been at the top of military family issues for several years and was mentioned by President Bush in his 2008 State of the Union address. We greatly appreciate this provision and believe it will have a significant impact on the retention of our career force.

For today's hearing, you asked me to comment on the role that the Department of Defense (DoD) will play in the implementation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill and how DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will work together to ensure success in the roll-out of this new program.

Implementation and administration of the Post 9/11 GI Bill is the responsibility of VA; however, we recognize that DoD has an important role in its success, and we take this role very seriously. Immediately after enactment of Public Law 110-252, I charged a senior member of my staff with the responsibility to guide the DoD efforts in support of this new program. He is in constant contact with senior staff in the VA Education Service. DoD and VA formed four working groups comprised of representatives from the Services, the Joint Staff, other parts of the OSD staff, data management staff from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) – the official repository of all DoD personnel data – and senior representatives from the VA Education Service.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill **Data Working Group** is the one that epitomizes the cooperation between DoD and VA. The road to becoming a veteran always entails passage through service in the military. Accurate reporting of that service is vital to the determination of eligibility for post-service education benefits. We recognize our role in that reporting. To meet this end, our greatest emphasis is being placed on this working group. The GI Bill file manager from DMDC is in constant contact with VA staff and has made two visits to VA Education Service to establish the data requirements and rules. We are confident that we can begin to pass to VA the data necessary to implement the program by March 2009.

The overall Post 9/11 GI Bill **Implementation Working Group** is focusing on the impact to the force of the introduction of this new program, with particular emphasis on developing the policies necessary to establish the provisions of Sec 3316, *Supplemental education assistance: members with critical skills or specialty; members serving additional service*, which allows the Services to continue the use of “kickers” to assist in steering high quality youth into critical and hard-to-fill military specialties. Senior members of VA Education Service are integral to this working group. The policies and procedures developed by this group will result in an internal DoD Instruction (DoDI) this coming spring.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill **Transferability Working Group** is developing the policies and procedures to implement this vital new program in support of the Services' retention programs. Senior members of VA Education Service are also integral to this working group. The policies and procedures developed by the Transferability Working Group also will be included in the DoDI this coming spring.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill **Strategic Message and Outreach Working Group** is focusing on how DoD and the Services will market this new program both internally and externally with a clear and consistent message. Senior members of VA Education Service in this group are helping us develop our marketing strategy.

As you can see, DoD is committed to the success of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, and has been working very closely with VA Education Service since enactment, and plans to continue working side-by-side with them. The Post 9/11 GI Bill will have major impacts on DoD recruiting and retention and, as you know, few areas, if any, are more important to us than those in implementing this program. We recognize our duty to staff the All-Volunteer Force with high-quality, motivated, and well-trained men and women. As we move through the 21st Century, we must continue to build upon the remarkable legacy of the visionaries who crafted preceding versions of and improvements to the GI Bill. I thank this Committee for its dedicated support to the men and women who currently serve, and those who have served, our great nation.