

Draft Legislation and Various Other Priority Issues

May 02, 2011

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE

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

WITH RESPECT TO

H.R. 802, H.R. 1383, H.R. 1657, and DRAFT Legislation

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Mr. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THIS COMMITTEE:

On behalf of the 2.1 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and our Auxiliaries, the VFW would like to thank this committee for the opportunity to present its views on these bills.

H.R. 802, to direct VA to establish a “VetStar” Award program.

The VFW applauds the idea behind H.R. 802, which would recognize businesses for their contributions to veterans’ employment, but believes that funding to establish criteria and to promote this type of program would also be needed. In establishing a “VetStar” award, outreach would have to be increased within the private sector to encourage employment opportunities for veterans, something that the Department of Labor’s Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) would be better suited to provide. Also, VETS, under its array of programs, has access to private and public sector employment data, which would allow them to verify and acknowledge companies that take the initiative in employing and promoting veterans.

H.R. 1383, The Restoring GI Bill Fairness Act of 2011

The VFW greatly appreciates Chairman Miller’s initiative in introducing this legislation. It addresses what is perhaps the most harmful deficiency with the current Post -9/11 GI Bill – that is, the lack of a “hold harmless” provision to ensure that students are not saddled with debt or out-of-pocket expenses as a result of changes in tuition payment rates set to take effect this August.

Over the past two years, many students chose a particular degree program with the expectation that the Yellow Ribbon Program they began with would still be there when they completed their degree. Changes made to the Post- 9/11 GI Bill last year, positive as they were, made significant changes specific to the Yellow Ribbon Program without protecting current students from the impact. Many could find themselves making the choice between transferring schools or paying hefty tuition bills if they choose to remain. H.R. 1383 would preclude changes made to the Yellow Ribbon Program for students who were already working on their degrees. This is good legislation and the VFW strongly supports it.

H.R. 1657, to amend title 38, United States Code, to revise the enforcement penalties for misrepresentation of a business concern as a small business concerned owned and controlled by veterans or as a small business concern owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans.

VFW supports H.R. 1657, as it would provide a more robust reinforcement of laws for the

misrepresentation of small businesses owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans. Provisions in the bill include harsher penalties and protections for service-disabled and veteran-owned businesses involved in contracting, as well as increased oversight into the process. We also believe that this bill would be a step forward in encouraging positive action with regard to veterans' preference in contracting.

DRAFT Bill, to amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the authority of VA to provide specially adapted housing assistance to individuals residing temporarily in housing owned by a family member.

VFW supports the reauthorization of this critical benefit. Through VA's adaptive housing grant program, hundreds of our most severely injured veterans have been given an opportunity to ease back into civilian life while gaining some sense of independence as they recuperate under the care of a family member. With the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is important to continue providing a benefit that significantly improves the lives of our severely injured veterans. By extending the grant program through December 31, 2016, you will increase the flexibility of the benefit while making a difference in the quality of life for many disabled veterans and their families.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or the members of the Committee may have.