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TESTIMONY OF
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VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
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 TOPIC OF:
"PENDING LEGISLATION"

MARCH 20, 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 modernization of the Post-9/11 GI Bill® and other pending legislation. With over 1,500 chapters representing the more than 700,000 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.

Many of the topics under consideration focus on the issues of transition, education, and employment. In addition to these topics, we'd like to address the ongoing situation with Ashford University.² At this time, it is unclear what the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in conjunction with the state approving agencies (SAA) intend to conclude regarding the case. At present, Ashford effectively has no current approval for GI Bill funds, while the school continues to seek approval in several states including Arizona and California.^{3, 4}

As the situation remains unclear, we support the intent of VA at minimum stop new enrollments of GI Bill students until the situation is resolved.⁵ Historically, we have provided direct support to student veterans and their families that have been displaced from tenuous education situations. It is clear that resolving this situation as soon as possible is in the best interest of students and all others involved. As Forever GI Bill implementation is ongoing, we recognize the constraints on the VA education service staff.

We also strongly applaud Director Rob Worley and his team for their incredible commitment to the implementation of the historic Forever GI Bill legislation and other economic opportunity programs.

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H.R. 1206, Reducing Barriers for Veterans Education Act of 2017

This bill proposes allowing eligible Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients to charge a pro-rated cost of application fees when applying to schools up to \$750 to GI Bill entitlement. In some cases, students are dissuaded from attending school due to the cost of various application fees. We strongly believe there should be as few barriers as possible preventing a student from attending any school of their choosing, and this is a common-sense solution that

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 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Education and Training, ASHFORD UNIVERSITY, <https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/ashford.asp>.

³ Vasquez, Michael. The Chronicle of Higher Education. *Ashford U. faces new setback in battle over GI Bill funds*. 21 February 2017. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Ashford-U-Faces-New-Setback/242602>.

⁴ Vasquez, Michael. The Chronicle of Higher Education. *Inside the Scramble to Save Ashford U*. Nov 10, 2017.

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Inside-the-Scramble-to-Save/241747>.

⁵ *Id.*



empowers students with the discretion to cover these up-front costs. More importantly, the bill proposes pro-rating these charges against GI Bill entitlement, thereby allowing the costs to be equally reflected in the charge instead of previous methods of charges which cost the student an entire month of entitlement.

The movement towards micro-assessing entitlement for administrative barriers to educational success is a positive trend for student veterans and their families, allowing a scalpel approach in covering costs associated with attending school or completing training. For example, the Forever GI Bill signed into law last year included provision 108, which afforded students the opportunity to charge a pro-rated amount of entitlement to cover the costs of completing certification or licensure tests.⁶ We appreciate Rep. Luke Messer's thoughtful approach to this challenge, and the interest in increasing access to the GI Bill for those who earned it. Student Veterans of America supports this bill.

H.R. 3023, To amend title 38, United States Code, to eliminate...

This bill proposes termination of the reporting fee associated with the Post-9/11 GI Bill intended to defray the costs of processing payments for student tuition. The Forever GI Bill raised the reporting fee to \$16 per student to more accurately reflect the resources needed for school certifying officials (SCO) on campuses to certify the enrollments of GI Bill users.⁷ Congress has functionally used this fee as a checking account since the passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2008, with the fee rising or falling in accordance with the prioritization of other costs associated with the GI Bill. While we see this fee as a critical component of the administration of the GI Bill, we also appreciate the fact that constrained fiscal circumstances require a hard look at all costs across the federal budget. Understanding the return on investment of finite and valuable taxpayer dollars is of critical importance.

To quote House Veterans Affairs Committee Subcommittee Chairman Jodey Arrington, "It's not just about inputs and outputs, but most importantly—*outcomes*."⁸ As such, the outcomes for schools in the case of student veterans is a clear issue. Students typically pay some level of a "discount rate" when they cover the cost of tuition.⁹ In fact, GI Bill users are largely the only student population still paying the full cost of attendance. Universities that understand this business opportunity tend to recruit student veterans in droves; while some of these schools take this recruitment to an extreme level employing predatory practices, good schools ought to recognize the business value of recruiting GI Bill users whether there is a reporting fee, or not.¹⁰ We strongly oppose the removal of this fee, which mitigates the cost of processing GI Bill payments. However, we also recognize the inherent value of student veterans to any campus community.^{11, 12}

H.R. 3940, Veterans Education Disaster Assistance Act

This bill seeks to address an unfortunate but painful reality that natural disasters will interrupt the education of some student veterans as they seek degrees and credentials. Most recently, wildfires in California and Hurricane

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 Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2017 §304. Pub. L 115-48. (2017). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3218>.

⁸ United States. Cong. House. Committee on Veterans Affairs. *An Update on the Implementation of the Forever GI Bill, the Harry W. Colmery Educational Assistance Act of 2017. Hearings, December 12, 2017.* 115th Cong. 2nd sess.

⁹ Baum, S., Lapovsky, L. The College Board. *Tuition Discounting: Not Just a Private College Practice.* (2006) http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/press/tuition-discounting.pdf

¹⁰ Westervelt, Eric. National Public Radio Education. *For-Profit colleges seeking veterans' GI Bill dollars aren't always the best fit.* 29 January 2017. <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/01/29/464579497/veterans-to-higher-ed-big-room-for-improvement>.

¹¹ Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Student Veterans of America. *I am A Post-9/11 Student Veteran.* (2017). <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/I-AM-A-POST-911-Student-Veteran-REPORT.pdf>

¹² Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Student Veterans of America. *Student Veterans: A Valuable Asset to Higher Education.* (2017). https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Student-Veterans_Valuable_9.8.17_NEW.pdf



Harvey in Texas greatly affected schools, and student veterans experienced this serious challenge first-hand.^{13, 14} This bill would provide housing stipends and supply fee payments for Post-9/11 GI Bill users affected by extended school closures caused by natural disaster, specifically those students forced to discontinue studies due to a school closure if students choose to pursue course of education solely by distance learning or an alternative course of education by distance learning. GI Bill users would be afforded a monthly stipend for an amount they would be entitled to if pursuing education at the school and an additional lump sum for books, supplies, equipment, and other necessary education costs to avoid a break in their education.

The duration of this solution would cover costs of up to a period of four months, and no additional charge would be made to the student's entitlement. When natural disaster strikes, the last thing student veterans should worry about is their opportunity to properly complete their education, and the resources afforded to make that possible. We applaud Rep. Ted Poe for hearing the voices of student veterans in Texas, as our chapters brought these concerns to the forefront of policy in 2017. Student Veterans of America strongly supports this bill, and we appreciate the dedication to addressing the challenges related to education in light of an otherwise tragic crisis.

H.R. 4451, Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2017

This bill proposes a five-year extension of the homeless veterans' reintegration program, and also provides clarification regarding eligibility for program services. The program is currently authorized by law, with the executing agent as the Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Transition Service (DoL VETS) program.¹⁵ Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) grantees provide a core set of services determined by the needs of veterans, the employers in the area, and the local labor market. Services are focused on providing veterans experiencing homelessness with relevant skills, connecting these veterans to employers, and improving employment outcomes and earnings for veterans while they are enrolled.

The program has a broader focus beyond just online job applications, with an emphasis on quality placements and sustained retention. HVRP achieves this through four core activities including outreach, assessment and intake, job-driven training and employment, and follow-up services.¹⁶ Grants under this program are awarded on a competitive basis to eligible applicants such as state and local Workforce Investment Boards (WIB), non-profit organizations, commercial entities, and others.¹⁷ Program outcomes as cited in the program evaluation demonstrate that nearly two-thirds of all program participants are placed into employment, enabling them to break the cycle of homelessness.¹⁸

The unfortunate truth is that some student veterans face hurdles in affording housing, or have inconsistent housing options. Over the past several years, a number of student veterans have reached out to our organization for support with their housing situation, in some instances after the individual was already in need of emergency support. While homelessness is not a core competency of Student Veterans of America, we always seek to support student veterans in any way possible, to include connecting homeless veterans with our partners with expertise in supporting these issues.

¹³ Fain, Paul. Inside Higher Ed. *Southern California Wildfires Threaten Colleges*. 7 December 2017.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2017/12/07/southern-california-wildfires-threaten-colleges>

¹⁴ Roll, Nick. Inside Higher Ed. *Texas Colleges Brave Harvey*. 28 August 2017. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/08/28/texas-colleges-cope-hurricane-harvey>

¹⁵ Title 38 USC Section 2021, added by Section 5 of Public Law 107-95, the *Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001*, <https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ95/PLAW-107publ95.pdf>

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service. HOMELESS VETERANS' REINTEGRATION PROGRAM. <https://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/hvrp/>

¹⁷ Avar Consulting, Inc, U.S. Department of Labor. *Formative Evaluation of the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program*. (Sept. 2016)

https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/Formative_Evaluation_of_the_Homeless_Veterans_Reintegration_Program_Report.pdf

¹⁸ *Id.*



In these instances, we have referred cases to our friends at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion. Both organizations have emergency funds to address such situations; I'd like to highlight the VFW's "Unmet Needs" program, which has been particularly impactful.¹⁹ We have also worked closely with the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) and their incredible team with a nation-wide network of homeless resources.²⁰ Homelessness among student veterans is often overlooked due to the assumption that all student veterans have the GI Bill to cover the cost of their housing.

There are numerous reasons that a student veteran does not have GI Bill benefits eligibility despite the false myth that "all veterans go to school for free" including: those who have expended their GI Bill, student veterans with families and other financial obligations, students without full or any GI Bill eligibility due to Guard or Reserve status, or those without GI Bill eligibility due to discharge or otherwise legal status. Student Veterans of America believes no veteran should ever be homeless, and recognizes homelessness broadly as a national tragedy. We thank Rep. Brad Wenstrup for identifying the need for extending this program, and strongly support this bill.

H.R. 4830, SIT-REP Act

This bill proposes requiring schools that accept VA education dollars to adopt veteran-friendly policies that prevent discriminating student veterans and their families due to payment issues from VA. The bill would disapprove any school that fails to adopt policies that (1) permit covered individuals to attend institution after providing a certificate of eligibility for entitlement to education benefits under Chapters 30, 31, 33, or 35 until institution receives payment for course or 90 days after certificate of eligibility provided; and (2) prohibit institutions from imposing any penalty, including late fees, denial of access to classes, facilities, etc., or requirement that the individual borrow additional funds due to delayed benefit disbursement.

Schools may view payments from GI Bill students as delayed, and thereby require students to take out unnecessary loans or assess unfair late fees, while the timing of the payments is under no control of the student. In the case of Post-9/11 GI Bill, for example, the VA requires the SCO to certify the student enrollment before VA authorizes payment for each of those students. This requirement prevents overpayments and otherwise potentially harmful "clawbacks" from students. Understanding that timely payments to schools is important, schools must recognize that penalizing students for using their earned GI Bill benefits due to the perceived delays of administrative burden is wholly inappropriate.

In some cases, families of the fallen have been unfairly targeted with late fees due to the VA's delayed or late payments at no fault of the student.²¹ While some schools have received billions of dollars of Post-9/11 GI Bill dollars, we call on higher education as an industry to be flexible with service-affiliated students using VA education benefits, as it is greatly in their interest to find ways to support this important population of non-traditional students. Schools that already provide this level of flexibility to these students should have no additional burden in compliance with these rules, and Student Veterans of America supports the passage of this bill.

SVA PROPOSAL, Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity

In a recent House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs and Economic Opportunity Subcommittees hearing on the topic of "Department of Veterans Affairs Fiscal Year 2019 Budget: Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the Board of Veterans' Appeals," Student Veterans of America's Director of Policy, Lauren Augustine, testified on the lack of resource-focus on economic opportunity programs at

¹⁹ Veterans of Foreign Wars. FINANCIAL GRANTS. <https://www.vfw.org/assistance/financial-grants>

²⁰ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV). <http://www.nchv.org>

²¹ Haycock, Ashlynn. *Testimony for Hearing on the Topic of "Pending Legislation."* March 20, 2018, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittees on Economic Opportunity.



VA.²² VA has 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.”²³

With economic opportunity as a stated priority of VA, we propose the establishment of a Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration at VA, including the creation of a new political appointment for an Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity who would report directly to the Secretary (see *Appendix A*). 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 B for detailed division of applicable programs*).

Our proposal limits the number of additional full-time employees to the current footprint of these programs, thereby limiting any expansion of government and bureaucracy; on the contrary, the proposal flattens government, and increases the efficiency of an otherwise historically neglected set of veteran-empowering programs. Functionally, we propose converting the currently vacant role of the Deputy Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity into a political appointment as an Under Secretary. This has a laundry list of much-needed outcomes:

- **Increases Accountability.** As of this hearing, it has been 886 days since VA last had a permanent Under Secretary of Benefits.²⁴ As noted, there is currently no Deputy Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity. When congress, other federal agencies, and other external partners seek accountability, there is effectively nobody to “answer the mail.”²⁵ 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.”²⁶ This proposal supports the importance of transition, education, employment, and well-being. Further, sends a strong signal 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 VBA is not the answer. The lack of a clear response on several basic questions regarding several economic opportunity programs at VA

²² 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>.

²³ 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>.

²⁴ Shane, Leo. Military Times. *VA benefits chief Allison Hickey resigns*. October 16, 2015.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/veterans/2015/10/16/va-benefits-chief-allison-hickey-resigns/>

²⁵ Student Veterans of America acknowledges there is a current Under Secretary of Benefits candidate pending congressional approval, and several acting personnel temporarily filling these roles, though we find temporary personnel insufficient due to the institutional hesitance to make structural decisions.

²⁶ 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>



underscored the importance of leadership in this area, and was a direct result of a structure not functioning to benefit the end user.²⁷ 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 that the bureaucracy of VA is not resulting in resources being devoted to these issues consistent with the needs of veterans.²⁸

- **Establishes Direct Counterpart.** DoL and the Department of Defense (DoD) presently lack a direct counterpart within VA, 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 better whole-of-government outcomes. Issues such as transition and employment presently suffer from a lack of long-term attention, leading to unimpressive outcomes. Testifying on transition and employment issues in a Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing, John Campbell, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Transition Policy stated that, “A key component [of transition] is introducing information to servicemembers early in their careers, not just at the time of separation.” Campbell specifically noted that, “waiting until the end of military service to educate the war fighter...is too late.” This testimony was delivered to the committee seven years ago, yet transition challenges continue to plague this important population of Americans.²⁹
- **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 children. Creation of an Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity will empower veterans to be successful as they transition, through improved education programs, better employment opportunities. One of the major challenges facing veterans today is “transition stress”, an issue that an Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity would be keen to address.³⁰ With better service and stronger outcomes, more veterans will be apt to “Choose VA.”

Disappointingly, some within the VA structure that have voiced opposition to the importance of elevating these issues with the creation of Under Secretary of Economic Opportunity. 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 purpose behind the concept. Furthermore, we anticipate long-term costs actually decreasing due to additional program scrutiny resulting in more cost-effective program management.

Citing consolidation being a driving factor in increased communication—communication which should occur regardless—is a poor justification for preventing this greatly needed proposal. While current acting leadership may be exceptional at their ability to implement these programs, program implementation has been historically inconsistent, and may wane in the future to the detriment of veterans. It appears maintenance of bureaucracy is the chief concern for those opposing this proposal, placing an emphasis on preserving “the way things are” for the sake of doing so, versus the prioritization of the customer: veterans. We believe this to be a short-sighted view, and favor looking towards the future instead.

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Budget. FY 2019 Budget Submission. <https://www.va.gov/budget/products.asp>

²⁹ Senate Hearing 112-19, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, *Veterans Employment: Improving the Transition from the Battlefield to the Workplace*. April 13, 2011, <http://www.gpo.gov?fdays?browse?committee.action?chamber=senate&committee=va>

³⁰ 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/>



When previously introduced in the 114th Congress, veterans organizations came out in force to support the 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).³¹ Today, our proposal further simplifies the concept and suggest no intention of impacting the DoL VETS program; additional veterans organizations have stepped up to share their support for the current concept including: The Travis Manion Foundation, The Mission Continues, The Retired Enlisted Association, High Ground Veterans Advocacy, and others. While some prefer the status quo, we recognize that bold initiatives are required to ensure our country delivers the best outcomes possible for veterans.

VA proudly cites that the Department, “has a mission to help veterans maximize their economic competitiveness and thus, increase the number of economic opportunities for Veterans and their families.”³² This proposal will maximize the notion that the Department publicly espouses in empowering veterans for 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.”³³ Future generations of veterans are counting on the success of this proposal, and we’re eager to work with this Congress and President Trump in making it a reality. Student Veterans of America is eager to work with this.

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In addition to the testimony on the previously mentioned legislation, we generally support the following bills, though we have no formal position on these proposals at this time: H.R. 4835, the *Job Training through Off-Base Opportunities and Local Support for Veterans Act*; H.R. 5044, the *Service-Disabled Veterans Small Business Continuation Act*; DRAFT, the *VA Home Loan Improvement Act of 2018*.

The success of veterans in higher education is no mistake or coincidence. Research consistently demonstrates that this unique population of non-traditional students is far outpacing their peers in many measures of academic performance.³⁴ At our 10th annual national conference, the President and CEO of SVA, Jared Lyon, shared the story of the quote on our anniversary challenge coin noting, “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.’”³⁵

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.

³¹ 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.

³² 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>.

³³ <https://ntrl.ntis.gov/NTRL/dashboard/searchResults/titleDetail/PB2006113212.xhtml>

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ 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.



**William Hubbard,
Vice President of Government Affairs**



Will Hubbard joined the professional staff of Student Veterans of America in February 2014. Mr. Hubbard is frequently called to testify to Congress on a variety of topics related to higher education and veterans. He also regularly advises the White House and senior executives of the Administration on the interests of student veterans and higher education policy.

Mr. Hubbard received his Bachelors in International Studies from American University. After graduating, he spent several years serving government agencies to include the Department of the Navy, Department of State, and the State of Indiana Department of Revenue in his role as a Federal Strategy and Operations Consultant.

As a National Executive Committee Member of Deloitte's Armed Forces Business Resource Group, Mr. Hubbard was dedicated to the achievement of veterans, and led the successful proposal of two veteran-focused pro bono projects. Prior to his career in consulting, he co-founded a successful startup business in the snack food industry, which expanded placement into 14 local stores.

Most recently, Mr. Hubbard deployed to Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) to conduct force protection activities including threat assessments, review of the human terrain, and liaison with joint operations units as well as executive-level embassy personnel. The mission included operations in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and humanitarian assistance to Haiti in the days after Hurricane Matthew.

Mr. Hubbard joined the Marine Corps Reserve in 2006 and initially served with 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines. Today, he continues to serve at Quantico, VA, and most recently deployed to Central America with a Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force. He has served SVA at both the chapter and national levels, and has been passionate about veterans' issues since entering the armed services.



APPENDIX A

To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish the Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Section 1. Short Title

This Act may be cited as the Ida Blanche DePuy Veterans Opportunity Act of 2017.

Section 2. Establishment of Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration.

(a) Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration—

(1) In general—Part V of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new chapter:

CHAPTER 80—VETERANS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ADMINISTRATION

Sec. 8001. Organization of Administration.

Sec. 8002. Functions of Administration.

§ 8001. Organization of Administration

(a) Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration—There is in the Department of Veterans Affairs a Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration. The primary function of the Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration is the administration of the programs of the Department that provide assistance related to economic opportunity to veterans and their dependents and survivors.

(b) Under Secretary for Economic Opportunity—The Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration is under the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity, who is directly responsible to the Secretary for the operations of the Administration.

§ 8002. Functions of Administration.

The Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration is responsible for the administration of the following programs of the Department:

- (1) Educational assistance programs.
- (2) Vocational rehabilitation and employment programs.
- (3) Veterans' housing loan and related programs.
- (4) The verification of small businesses owned and controlled by veterans pursuant to subsection (f) of section 8127 of this title including the administration of the database of veteran-owned businesses in such subsection.



(5) The transition assistance program under section 1144 of title 10.

(6) Any other program of the Department that the Secretary determines appropriate.

(2) Clerical Amendments—The tables of chapters at the beginning of title 38, United States Code, and of part V of title 38, United States Code, are each amended by inserting after the item relating to chapter 79 the following new item:

80. Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration 8001

(b) Effective Date—Chapter 80 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall take effect on October 1, 2019.

(c) Full-Time Employees—For fiscal year 2019 and 2020, the total number of full-time equivalent employees authorized for the Veterans Benefits Administration and Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration, as established under chapter 80 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), may not exceed 22,791.

SEC 3. Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity

(a) Under Secretary—

(1) In General—Chapter 3 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by inserting after section 306 the following new section:

§ 306A. Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity

(a) Under Secretary—There is in the Department an Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity, who is appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Under Secretary for Economic Opportunity and Transition shall be appointed without regard to political affiliation or activity and solely on the basis of demonstrated ability in—

(1) information technology; and

(2) the administration of programs within the Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration or programs of similar content and scope.

(b) Responsibilities—The Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity is the head of, and is directly responsible to the Secretary for the operations of, the Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration.

(c) Vacancies—

(1) Whenever a vacancy in the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity occurs or is anticipated, the Secretary shall establish a commission to recommend individuals to the President for appointment to the position.

(2) A commission established under this subsection shall be composed of the following members appointed by the Secretary:



(A) Three persons representing education and training, vocational rehabilitation, employment, real estate, mortgage finance and related industries, and survivor benefits activities affected by the Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration.

(B) two persons representing veterans served by the Veterans Economic Opportunity Administration.

(C) Two persons who have experience in the management of private sector benefits programs of similar content and scope to the economic opportunity and transition programs of the Department.

(D) The Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

(F) One person who has held the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity, if the Secretary determines that it is desirable for such person to be a member of the commission.

(3) A commission established under this subsection shall recommend at least three individuals for appointment to the position of Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity. The commission shall submit all recommendations to the Secretary. The Secretary shall forward the recommendations to the President and the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representative with any comments the Secretary considers appropriate. Thereafter, the President may request the commission to recommend additional individuals for appointment.

(4) The Assistant Secretary or Deputy Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs who performs personnel management and labor relations functions shall serve as the executive secretary of a commission established under this subsection.

(d) Clerical Amendment— The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 306 the following new item:

306A. Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity.

(b) Conforming Amendments—Title 38, United States Code, is further amended—

(1) in section 306(c)(2), by striking subparagraphs (A) and (E) and redesignating subparagraphs (B), (C), (D), and (F), as subparagraphs (a) through (D), respectively;

(2) in section 317(d)(2), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity,”;

(3) in section 318(d)(2), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity,”;

(4) in section 516(e)(2)(C), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity”;



(5) in section 541(a)(2)(B), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity”;

(6) in section 542(a)(2)(B)(iii), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity”;

(7) in section 544(a)(2)(B)(vi), by striking “Health and the Under Secretary for Benefits” and inserting “Health, the Under Secretary for Benefits, and the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity”;

(8) in section 709(c)(2)(A), by inserting after “Under Secretary for Benefits,” the following: “the Under Secretary for Veterans Economic Opportunity,”;

(9) in section 7701(a), by inserting after “assistance” the following: “, other than assistance related to Economic Opportunity and Transition,”; and

(10) in section 7703, by striking paragraphs (2) and (3) and re-designating paragraph (4) and (5) as paragraphs (2) and (3), respectively.

(c) Effective Date—Section 306A of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), and the amendments made by this section, shall take effect on October 1, 2019.



APPENDIX B

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.



APPENDIX C

Ida Blanche DePuy
5/18/1921 – 4/24/2003

Ida Blanche DePuy, 81, of Monterey County, Calif., a retired professor of Spanish and Portuguese, died April 24.

She served the University for 20 and a half years before retiring in 1985. She coordinated Language and Area Studies, and developed and directed the University's Summer Graduate Seminar in Madrid, Spain. She previously taught at Wellesley College, from where she had graduated in 1942.

After college she was commissioned by the Naval Reserve, where she served in communications intelligence for four years, reaching the rank of lieutenant.

She joined the International Telecommunications Union, a subsidiary of the United Nations, as a conference specialist - the only female executive in the union at that time.

After helping to establish a simultaneous interpretation system in the Maison des Congres in Geneva, she returned to school, receiving a master's degree from the University of Pittsburgh and a doctorate from Stanford University.

An authority on Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, she specialized in teaching 19th-century novels and the history of ideas.

After retiring, she served in the American Association of University Women and was a representative for the association's Coalition for Reproductive Rights. She also served on the Monterey County Commission on the Status of Women, and the Sylvia Panetta Scholarship Board at Monterey Peninsula College.