



T H E M I L I T A R Y C O A L I T I O N

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STATEMENT

of

THE MILITARY COALITION

on

Veterans Education and Benefits Legislation

before the

Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

House Veterans' Affairs Committee

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Presented by

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The Military Coalition

MISTER CHAIRMAN AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE. On behalf of The Military Coalition, a consortium of nationally prominent uniformed services and veterans' organizations, I am grateful to the Subcommittee for this opportunity to express our views concerning issues affecting the uniformed services community. This testimony provides the collective views of the following military and veterans' organizations, which represent approximately 5.5 million current and former members of the seven uniformed services, plus their families and survivors.

- Air Force Association
- Air Force Sergeants Association
- Air Force Women Officers Associated
- American Logistics Association
- Army Aviation Association of America
- Association of Military Surgeons of the United States
- Association of the United States Army
- Chief Warrant Officer and Warrant Officer Association, U.S. Coast Guard
- Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc.
- Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States
- Fleet Reserve Association
- Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.
- Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America
- Marine Corps League
- Marine Corps Reserve Association
- Military Chaplains Association of the United States of America
- Military Officers Association of America
- Military Order of the Purple Heart
- National Association for Uniformed Services
- National Guard Association of the United States
- National Military Family Association
- National Order of Battlefield Commissions
- Naval Enlisted Reserve Association
- Naval Reserve Association
- Navy League of the United States
- Non Commissioned Officers Association
- Reserve Enlisted Association of the United States
- Reserve Officers Association
- Society of Medical Consultants to the Armed Forces
- The Retired Enlisted Association
- United Armed Forces Association
- United States Army Warrant Officers Association
- United States Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association
- Veterans' Widows International Network

The Military Coalition, Inc., does not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government.

Testimony of The Military Coalition: Executive Summary

H.R. 4791, the "Disabled Veterans Adaptive Housing Improvement Act" would help our severely disabled veterans live their lives in the most independent manner possible.

The Military Coalition supports this legislation.

Draft bill, H.R. ____ "the "Veterans Employment State Grant Improvement Act of 2006" seeks to enact a number of measures that would improve employment services for veterans provided under the Veterans' Employment and Training program.

The Military Coalition believes the success of this program revolves around the availability of a cadre of highly skilled and qualified personnel and therefore supports this legislation.

Draft bill H.R. _____, the "G.I. Bill Flexibility Act of 2006" which would authorize accelerated payment for certain courses and seeks to restore the MGIB entitlements reserve component members lose when mobilized.

The Military Coalition supports this legislation and encourages this Subcommittee to continue working towards a Total Force MGIB benefit for the 21st Century.

Draft bill H.R. _____, the "Veterans' Certification and Licensure Act of 2006" could facilitate a "seamless transition" for some separating service members.

The Military Coalition recommends favorable consideration of this bill.

The proposed amendment to H.R. 3082 would establish a goal that 3 percent of VA contract opportunities should go to small businesses owned by service-connected disabled veterans.

Whereas the intent of this legislation is commendable, past history and the lack of a mandatory component suggests this effort will not result in enhanced business opportunities for these veterans. The Military Coalition does not oppose the measure and recommends the Subcommittee consider adding a mandatory component to ensure the VA is proactively working to meet the 3 percent goal.

H.R. 4791, the "Disabled Veterans Adaptive Housing Improvement Act"

This legislation aims to help disabled veterans return to the normalcy of home life by expanding eligibility for VA adaptive housing assistance. As written, the proposed legislation would increase from \$50,000 to \$60,000 the maximum amount authorized to be provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs to certain disabled veterans for the construction of specially adapted housing; and from \$10,000 to \$12,000 the maximum amount authorized for specially adapted features in a home. Additionally, the bill would require the VA to annually increase these amounts in such a manner so as to reflect increases in the cost of residential home construction. *This legislation will help our severely disabled veterans live their lives in the most independent manner possible and The Military Coalition supports its passage.*

H.R. _____, the "Veterans Employment State Grant Improvement Act of 2006"

This draft bill would enact a number of measures intended to improve employment services for veterans provided under the Veterans' Employment and Training program. *Without question, the success of this program lies primarily on the availability of a cadre of highly skilled and qualified personnel. Therefore, the Military Coalition supports the purpose and intent of this legislation.*

H.R. _____, the "G.I. Bill Flexibility Act of 2006"

The payment structure of the current MGIB was designed to provide assistance to veterans pursuing traditional 4-year degrees at universities by offering benefits, distributed monthly for up to 36 months. Today most veterans have to work and support families so traditional degrees are not always the best option. With heightened job, financial, and family responsibilities, more and more veterans are pursuing and education using the condensed learning schedules which most colleges and universities are now offering. Presently, lump-sum payments under the MGIB are available for certain high tech courses and for licensure and certification exams.

This draft bill would allow accelerated payment of MGIB benefits to accommodate the compressed schedule of modern-day courses that lead to certification or licensure in an occupation in an industry that has a critical shortage of employees, or is an industry that is experiencing a high growth rate. The limitation on maximum accelerated payments would be \$10,000, except for veterans with service-connected disabilities. The Act would provide special rules to authorize the amount of the accelerated payment for service-connected disabled veterans to equal 75 percent of the established charges.

The draft bill also contains language which would restore lost MGIB entitlements to mobilized reserve component members. Currently if a reserve component member has to discontinue a course of study for recall, under MGIB, Chapter 1606, those months of study are charged against the 36 months entitlement period because of failure to receive

credit for the course. Strictly as a matter of fairness, mobilized reservists should not have to forego the benefits they literally risk their lives for.

Earlier this year, Chairman Buyer indicated his desire to renovate and restructure the Montgomery GI Bill into a Total Force Benefit for the 21st Century that better supports military recruitment and retention and veterans' readjustment. One major improvement sought by TMC and the other members of The Partnership for Veterans Education is to integrate Chapters 1606 and 1607, 10 USC, with the active duty MGIB under Title 38. This action would facilitate the coordination of benefits between the active duty and reserve programs and streamline the oversight and management of the MGIB. *TMC endorses the GI Bill Flexibility Act of 2006 but we note that, unfortunately, a worthy MGIB improvement will be available only to active duty veterans.*

Mobilized reservists who have gone into harm's way will be ineligible for proportional benefits under the draft legislation, since the bill applies only to Title 38. TMC strongly urges the Subcommittee to work towards early enactment of a Total Force MGIB that provides benefits in proportion to military service rendered to the nation.

H.R. _____, the "Veterans' Certification and Licensure Act of 2006"

This draft bill calls for an advisory committee to improve certification and licensing procedures for veterans. Its overall purpose would be to assist veterans seeking to utilize their military training and experience to obtain civilian employment. *This move could facilitate a "seamless transition" for some separating service members. Therefore The Military Coalition recommends favorable consideration of this bill.*

Proposed amendment to H.R. 3082

The language of this proposed amendment seeks to increase VA contracting opportunities for small businesses owned and controlled by service-connected disabled veterans. The amendment would require VA to establish a goal of 3 percent each fiscal year for such contracts. *The Military Coalition has no objection to this measure. However we note that Public Law 106-50, the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999, established similar levels which to date have yet to be met. The veterans community might be better served by putting "teeth" into the proposed amendment and make the 3 percent level a mandatory number verses a goal that can be easily ignored.*

CONCLUSION

The Military Coalition wishes to express its profound gratitude for the extraordinary work this subcommittee does on a day-to-day basis on behalf of military veterans and their families. The Coalition is eager to continue its work with the Subcommittee and thanks you for the opportunity to present the Coalition's views on these important topics.

CURRICULUM VITAE

MSgt (Ret.) Morgan D. Brown is the Manager, Military and Government Relations (M&GR) for the Air Force Sergeants Association. As such, he works for the M&GR Director who is responsible to the Executive Director. This directorate serves as the association's liaison with Congress, the Administration, the military services, and other military and veterans' associations. Sergeant Brown served 22 years in the United States Air Force at numerous stateside and overseas locations. His last assignment was as a First Sergeant on Andrews AFB, in Maryland. He has served in his current position since May 2003.