

CARL BLAKE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

STATEMENT OF
CARL BLAKE
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR
PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
CONCERNING
PROPOSED BENEFITS LEGISLATION

MAY 7, 2008

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and members of the Committee, on behalf of Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the proposed benefits legislation. The scope of benefits issues being considered here today is very broad. We appreciate the Committee taking the time to address these many issues, and we hope that out of this process meaningful legislation will be approved to best benefit veterans.

S. 22, the "Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act"

As we did during the first session of the 110th Congress, PVA supports S. 22, the "Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act." This bill would enhance the current educational benefits for the men and women who have served on active duty since September 11, 2001. PVA, in conjunction with many veterans service organizations, including the co-authors of The Independent Budget-AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, and Veterans of Foreign Wars-have advocated for returning the GI Bill to the level established following World War II. We believe that S. 22 accomplishes that very goal.

The dollar amount of educational assistance would be equal to the established charges of an approved institution. This would give the veteran a greater selection of institutions to pursue their education since they would not be restricted to less expensive institutions. An additional amount of funding would be paid for room and board, and a monthly stipend would be paid to the student for other expenses. Tutorial assistance would also be available, and would be paid for a period up to 12 months to help the student with difficult courses. This amount would not be taken from the student's entitlement. The bill allows the veteran up to 15 years to take advantage of these benefits. This is an important addition since many returning veterans may not be emotionally ready right away to start school. This educational package offers the veteran many incentives to encourage them to enroll in school or continue with their educational program.

S. 161, the "Veterans' Disability Compensation Automatic COLA Act"

While PVA principally supports the concept of this legislation, we believe that passage of the bill could be detrimental to the legislative process. It certainly makes sense to have an automatic adjustment for disability compensation. However, because of the politics associated with all

forms of legislation before Congress-including veterans' issues-many veterans' benefits and health care improvements are ultimately approved because they are attached to the COLA bill-legislation that is deemed "must-pass." More often than not, the VA COLA bill becomes the only vehicle to advance other important veterans' legislation. By eliminating this piece of legislation from the Congressional agenda, Congress and veterans' service organizations lose an important tool to improve benefits and health care services for veterans.

S. 961, the "Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act"

Although we recognize the sacrifices that these brave men made in service to the nation during World War II and we support the intent of this legislation, we have some concerns with the proposals it makes. The importance of their sacrifices cannot be overstated. While suffering extremely high casualty rates during the war, they delivered troops, tanks, food, airplanes, fuel and other needed supplies to every theater of the war.

However, PVA believes that this bill would be very costly to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We believe that the money needed to provide this new monthly benefit would reduce the ability of the VA to continue to provide the wide-ranging scope of benefits that it already manages.

We also do not understand how the amount to be provided as a monthly benefit was determined. As it stands, if this legislation was enacted, a merchant mariner would be entitled to a payment equal to veterans who have a 70 percent compensable service-connected disability. Furthermore, the surviving spouses of these veterans would be entitled to a benefit nearly equal to the amount provided to the surviving spouses of veterans with service-connected disabilities. Although we do not dispute the idea that these veterans should receive some type of benefit, we do not believe that the recommendations of this legislation are equitable with similar programs. We are not certain that this legislation maintains the priority that the VA follows for providing compensation benefits.

S. 1718, the "Veterans Education Tuition Support Act"

PVA supports the provisions of S. 1718, the "Veterans Education Tuition Support Act." This legislation would provide for reimbursement to service members of tuition for programs of education interrupted by military service, for deferment of student loans, and for reduced interest rates for service members during that service. In recent years, Congress has taken important steps to update the Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act so as to provide proper protections to service members when they serve on active duty. The need for these improvements has been more pronounced with Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) due to the high number of National Guardsmen and Reservists being called to active duty. These men and women are seeing some of the highest activation rates in history in support of the War on Terror.

It is a shame to think that active duty service and deployments to war could have a negative impact on the education of service members, but that is exactly what is happening. This legislation would ensure that these brave men and women are not punished for their service. It would protect their right to attain higher education. It would also provide them a period of readjustment before their bills for education come due, while also allowing them the opportunity to return to the institution that they previously attended.

S. 2090

PVA fully supports the proposed legislation that would ensure privacy protection and security for records being handled by the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. This legislation would provide consistency for privacy and security procedures in the Court with other Federal courts.

S. 2091

PVA supports the proposed legislation that would increase the number of active judges sitting on the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims from seven to nine. We would like to provide a couple of recommendations as it relates to this potential change. First, if two new judges are added to the Court, it is important to ensure that the terms of the first two are appropriately staggered. We believe that one judge should serve for no more than five or seven years and the other judge should serve 10 to 12 years. This will ensure that the first two new judges and all subsequent judges will not leave the Court at the same time.

We would also recommend that Congress take more care to encourage the nomination of judges who have some prior experience in Veterans Law. Similarly, Congress could also ensure that the Court maintain an experienced and skilled central legal staff that would be in a position to assist newly appointed judges. With skilled legal staff and experienced Veterans Law judges, the transition to a nine-member Court would be eased.

S. 2138, the "Department of Veterans Affairs Reorganization Act"

PVA has no official position on S. 2138, the "Department of Veterans Affairs Reorganization Act." This legislation would establish a new position in the VA management structure-Assistant Secretary for Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction. We only wonder what the motivation is for creating this new position and potentially adding more layers to the complex VA bureaucracy.

S. 2139, the "National Guard and Reserve Educational Benefits Fairness Act"

As stated in The Independent Budget for FY 2009, "since September 11, 2001, more than 600,000 individuals who serve in National Guard and Reserve forces have been mobilized for a variety of military, police, and security actions. . .Guard and Reserve recruiting, retention, morale, and readiness are already at considerable risk." With the ever-increasing strain being placed on these men and women, it is important that Congress take steps to upgrade benefits and support programs available to them. Foremost of these are education benefits under the GI Bill. It is time that the men and women serving in the National Guard and Reserves receive GI bill benefits commensurate with their sacrifices. With this in mind, PVA supports S. 2139, the "National Guard and Reserve Educational Benefits Fairness Act."

S. 2309, the "Compensation for Combat Veterans Act"

PVA fully supports S. 2309, the "Compensation for Combat Veterans Act." This proposed legislation is in accordance with a recommendation included in The Independent Budget for FY 2009. As stated in The Independent Budget:

While VA recognizes the receipt of certain medals as proof of combat, only a fraction of those who participate in combat receive a qualifying medal [qualifying medals include combat badges and medals received for valor]. Further, military personnel records do not document combat experiences except for those who receive certain medals. As a result, veterans who are injured during combat or suffer a disease resulting from a combat environment are forced to try to provide evidence that does not exist or wait a year or more while the Department of Defense conducts research to determine whether a veteran's unit engaged in combat.

It is important to note that this legislation would not eliminate or alter in any way the requirement that a veteran's claim for disability have an official diagnosis or that a clear connection between that claimed disability and military service exists. It would simply relieve the burden placed on veterans who served in a combat theater of proving that the claimed disability was combat-related. As it currently exists in law, service in a combat zone or theater does not necessarily meet the threshold that the VA has established for recognizing a combat veteran. This loophole needs to be changed to benefit the veteran and we believe this legislation will accomplish that task.

S. 2471, the "USERRA Enforcement Improvement Act"

PVA supports S. 2471, the "USERRA Enforcement Improvement Act of 2007." This legislation will reduce the waiting times for USERRA cases and mandate that the Secretary of the VA refer these cases to the Attorney General's office within 15 days of receiving a complaint from a veteran. The Attorney General must then decide within 45 days if they will initiate an action and represent the veteran. Expediting this process is essential to indicate to veterans that the law created to protect their jobs while they serve the country is being enforced. Currently veterans do not file complaints because they lack confidence in the law.

S. 2550, the "Combat Veterans Debt Elimination Act"

PVA principally supports S. 2550, the "Combat Veterans Debt Elimination Act." However, we have a couple of concerns with the proposal. First, we believe that the legislation should afford the same benefit to any service member who might have been killed while serving in the line of duty. We do not think that a special distinction should be made between a service member who was killed in a combat theater and a service member who was killed while serving at his or her home duty station. We would ask: "What is the difference between having a tank roll over on the individual in Iraq or Afghanistan and a tank roll over on the individual at Fort Hood, Texas?" The benefit of this legislation should be afforded to any service member killed while serving this nation honorably.

Second, we wonder why a special exception is made in this legislation for certain debts to be collected. As we understand the bill, the only debt that the VA will be permitted to collect upon a service member's death is a home loan or small business loan.

S. 2617, the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act"

PVA supports S. 2617, the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008." This bill would increase the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for widows of certain

disabled veterans. As we have done in the past, we oppose again this year the provision rounding down the cost-of-living adjustment to the nearest whole dollar. Continuing to round down these benefits year after year only serves to erode the value of them. Furthermore, this provision forces veterans to bear some of the burden of cost-savings for the federal government.

S. 2674, the "America's Wounded Warriors Act"

PVA appreciates the effort being given to updating and modernizing the VA disability system. In fact, we have been very involved with a number of the Commissions that have been charged over the last couple of years-particularly the Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission and the Dole-Shalala Commission-with developing real solutions to the problems facing the Veterans Benefits Administration. We recognize that the claims processing system is in need of change. However, we believe that the current system is a fundamentally good system. As such, we oppose S. 2674, the "America's Wounded Warriors Act."

The majority of our concerns with this legislation rest with the establishment of the "enhanced VA disability compensation system" outlined in Title II. Section 201 and Section 202 call for studies that essentially lay the groundwork for this new compensation system. Section 201 calls for the VA to conduct a study to determine the rates of compensation that should be paid to a veteran for a service-connected disability under the new Chapter 12, Title 38 U.S.C. The proposed legislation specifically outlines certain factors to consider to include the nature of injuries and combination of injuries for which disability compensation is paid under other disability programs; how that concept applies to commercial disability insurance; the extent to which quality of life and loss of earnings are independently taken into account under other disability programs; the effect of an injury or combination of injuries on average loss of earning capacity and a veteran's quality of life; the measurement of the effect of an injury or combination of injuries on a veteran's psychological state, loss of physical integrity, and social inability to adapt; and the extent to which disability compensation for veterans may be used as an incentive to encourage them to seek and undergo appropriate medical treatment and vocational rehabilitation. Section 201 calls for a similar study as it relates to veterans' transition benefits.

We believe that these studies are redundant and unnecessary. The Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission spent nearly three years studying most, if not all, of these very concepts. Even the Dole-Shalala Commission examined these concepts, albeit in a much more hasty fashion. Moreover, the VA has already contracted with a private firm to conduct a study to address many of these concepts.

PVA opposes the suggestion in the conduct of these studies that the VA would be required to consider the appropriate injuries to be covered under the new disability rating schedule. This is clearly an attempt to remove certain injuries and illnesses from the ratings schedule that some people believe should not be included. However, we believe that the list of all injuries and illnesses included in the existing ratings schedule have validity based on medical evidence.

Furthermore, we adamantly oppose any suggestion that age should be a determining factor when considering average loss of earnings capacity. This concept ignores the fact that in many cases, veterans, and older Americans in general, work well past the arbitrary age of retirement. To punish these veterans by taking away compensation based on an arbitrary age limit is patently unfair.

PVA has also long opposed the notion that 21st century medicine and technology somehow makes an individual less disabled. To then use disability compensation as an incentive to seek treatment is counterproductive. Unfortunately, this very idea is implied by the desired findings of the studies to be undertaken in Section 203 of the proposed legislation. The fact is that the vast majority of disabilities and illnesses outlined in the VA's schedule for rating disabilities are incurable.

Lastly, as it relates to these required studies, we believe that a fair comparison cannot be made between the VA disability compensation system and other disability compensation systems used around the country. During discussions with the Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission, PVA explained that VA disability compensation is a benefit provided because an individual became disabled in service to the country. Compensation reflects the debt of gratitude this nation owes the men and women who served in uniform and recognizes the challenges they will face every day as a result of their service, both economically as well as socially. Nearly all other disability compensation programs studied during the Commission's work were shown to address simply loss of earnings or economic capacity.

PVA also has serious concerns about the approval process for the new disability evaluation system outlined in Section 205. The legislation sets up an all or nothing proposition for approval of the system. Such a process provides for no adjustment to the new approach once it is presented to Congress. Representatives and senators would be forced to simply say they support or oppose the system as a whole, notwithstanding any good or bad aspects of the proposal submitted by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. In our view, this does not reflect good legislative process.

PVA is concerned about provisions of Section 207 of the bill as well. Under this section, the "enhanced VA disability compensation system" would include ratings based on average loss of earning capacity and quality of life. However, veterans included under the old disability system in Chapter 11 of Title 38, would not receive benefits based on loss of quality of life. This creates a serious inequity among disabled veterans. We believe that if quality of life payments are going to be a part of a compensation package, then it should not be restricted to only those veterans choosing to be classified under the new disability system.

PVA believes that the most incomprehensible provision of this legislation is the requirement for the VA to reevaluate veterans on an as determined basis. It is important to point out that the VA already has the authority to reevaluate veterans for a particular disability. In fact, the VA uses this authority quite frequently based on objective medical evidence. The VA chooses to no longer reevaluate a veteran when the objective medical evidence compiled over a period of time proves that the veteran's condition has stabilized.

The legislation also provides for the opportunity to adjust a veteran's disability rating under Chapter 12. The VA will be required under Section 1207 to adjust a veteran's rating in accordance with reevaluations as well as due to changes that might have been made to the rating schedule since the veteran was last evaluated. Meanwhile, the legislation includes contradictory language that addresses this very point. Under the heading "Preservation of Rating," a veteran under Chapter 11 cannot have his or her disability rating reduced due to a change in the ratings

schedule. However, a veteran under Chapter 12 with the same disability may have his or her disability rating reduced.

This reevaluation process also essentially eliminates any protections veterans may have as it relates to the long-term status of their disability. It is very likely that many VA regional offices-particularly those that have come under scrutiny in recent years for low-balling veterans' disability ratings and by extension compensation rates-would see this as an opportunity to reduce any protected rating that can be justified. This is wholly unacceptable.

It also astounds us that this legislation would call for a procedure that would so overwhelm the disability evaluation system that it likely could not survive. By creating this reevaluation process, the claims backlog would never be reduced and only continue to grow at an enormous rate. Many veterans' claims would never leave this vicious cycle. Moreover, the VA could not even begin to address the rate of growth that would occur in the claims backlog given its current staffing and resource levels. Such a process would likely destroy the current VA claims process.

Given the concerns outlined here, we must reiterate our opposition to this bill. We believe that a completely new disability system in the VA is unnecessary. In fact, we believe the report released by the Veterans Disability Benefits Commission reaffirms that point. This is not to say that meaningful reforms cannot be made to the current system, but not at the expense of veterans and their families, particularly those who have served in previous conflicts.

S. 2683

PVA supports S. 2683, a bill that will modify certain authorities that VA has in the provision of educational benefits. First, the bill addresses current statute that allows the use of educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) for education leading to employment in the high technology industry. However, the original intent for this legislation was to provide assistance for short duration courses that lead to certification in technical fields. PVA supports this provision as it will reinforce the point that the MGIB is not only a recruitment tool, but a transition tool as well.

Likewise, PVA supports the provisions of the legislation that address the expanded scope of work that could be assigned to individuals participating in VA work study programs. The original public law specifically added to acceptable activities certain outreach services programs, activities relating to hospital and domiciliary care to veterans in State homes, and activities relating to the administration of national or state veterans' cemeteries. However, due to the fact that this program had a delimiting date, it was allowed to slip last year. This legislation would make this opportunity permanent.

S. 2701

PVA, at the national level, has no official position on this legislation which authorizes the VA to establish a national cemetery in the eastern region of Nebraska to serve veterans in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa. We would note that the Great Plains Chapter of PVA, located in Omaha, Nebraska, does support this proposal. According to VA information, there is currently only one national cemetery located in Maxwell, Nebraska. With the rate that veterans are dying today, particularly World War II veterans, it is imperative that the VA be able to provide a suitable burial location for these men and women.

S. 2737, the "Veterans' Rating Schedule Review Act"

PVA generally supports S. 2737, the "Veterans' Rating Schedule Review Act." We would like to point out up front that the text of the long title of the bill is not consistent with the text of the bill. We believe the title incorrectly refers to Section 1151 of Title 38 when it is meant to refer to Section 1155.

As we understand it, the proposed legislation will permit challenges to the rating schedule when not in compliance with "applicable" requirements of chapter 11 of Title 38. The only question we have is how far review of whether the rating schedule is in compliance with "applicable" requirements of chapter 11 (compensation for service-connection disability or death) will extend. However, a broad reading of such review may not be a bad thing.

Furthermore, while not addressed in this proposed legislation, we believe that Congress will also need to amend Section 7292 of Title 38 to give the Federal Circuit the authority to review decisions of the Veterans Court relating to Section 7252(b)(2)(B). If this change is not made, the Veterans Court's decisions on these issues would be non-reviewable. We believe that this could ultimately be harmful for veterans filing claims.

We would also like to suggest that you consider amending Section 502 of Title 38 to give the Federal Circuit the authority to review revisions of the rating schedule. Veterans and veterans' service organization representatives could then bring challenges to proposed amendments to the rating schedule which are not in compliance with the "applicable" requirements of chapter 11. Rule challenges can be a more effective way to correct situations where the VA is arguably not complying with a statute as opposed to individual cases which can take years and may be subject to facts which are not favorable to a clear presentation of a legal issue.

S. 2768

PVA supports S. 2768, a bill that would provide a temporary increase in the maximum loan guaranty amount for certain housing loans guaranteed by the VA. In light of the current difficulties in the housing market, any benefit that can be provided to veterans and their families when they purchase a home is vital. We believe that this proposed change in the law could help many more veterans, including the newest generation of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, to realize the dream of owning a home.

The home loan guaranty was last increased with the enactment of P.L. 108-454, the "Veterans Benefits Improvements Act of 2004." At that time, the maximum guaranty amount was increased to 25 percent of the Freddie Mac conforming loan limit. The current Freddie Mac conforming loan limit is approximately \$417,000, which allows the VA to guaranty up to \$104,250 for a veteran's home loan. However, the recently enacted Economic Stimulus Act increased the Freddie Mac loan guarantee limit to \$730,000, but it failed to provide a similar increase for the VA home loan guaranty. This proposed legislation will correct that oversight.

S. 2825, the "Veterans' Compensation Equity Act"

PVA has no specific objection to this proposed legislation. This legislation would allow for a minimum disability rating of 10 percent for veterans who are on continuous medication or who require the use of one or more adaptive devices, such as a hearing aid. We believe that this

legislation seems to address the inconveniences to quality of life that veterans face when they have to follow a medication regime or use an assistive device. We believe this legislation could certainly be beneficial to individuals who struggle at the bottom of the ratings schedule.

S. 2864, the "Training and Rehabilitation for Disabled Veterans Enhancement Act" PVA supports S. 2864, a bill to improve the outcome of the vocational rehabilitation and employment (VR&E) program of the VA and to eliminate the cap on the number of veterans enrolled in the independent living program. Many members of PVA have benefited from the vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs offered by the VA. We believe that VR&E is critical to the reintegration of severely disabled veterans into civilian life. The primary mission of the VR&E program is to provide veterans with service-connected disabilities all the necessary services and assistance to achieve maximum independence in daily living and to the maximum extent feasible, to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment.

In fact, PVA places such an importance on vocational rehabilitation that last year we designed our own vocational rehabilitation program to further support what the VA is already doing, and to go above and beyond current services. The concept of the program is to provide vocational rehabilitation services under a PVA - corporate partnership that augments the many existing vocational programs. PVA believes that by introducing veterans with SCI disability to vocational rehabilitation counselors specializing in SCI disability who are able to provide extensive vocational-oriented services early in the medical rehabilitation process and who can continue to provide services as needed, the productivity and employment rates for this group of veterans will improve.

In partnership with VA and Health Net Federal Services, PVA opened its first vocational rehabilitation office in the SCI Center of the VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia in July 2007. Buoyed by our rapidly growing caseload in Richmond, the establishment of productive relationships with the Veterans Health Administration and VR&E, PVA just recently opened a second vocational rehabilitation office in Minneapolis under the corporate sponsorship of Tri West Healthcare Alliance. We are confident that our continuing efforts in this initiative as well as the continuing efforts of our VA partners will result in the 85 percent unemployment rate among PVA members and other severely disabled veterans becoming a sad statistic of the past.

We are particularly pleased that the proposed legislation will repeal the limitation on the number of veterans enrolled in the VA's programs of independent living services and assistance. Currently, no more than 2,500 veterans can be enrolled in the independent living program in a given fiscal year. The cap that was placed on this program many years ago was an arbitrary number that was not aligned with the program's workload at that time and that gave no consideration to future workloads. The consequence of this cap is that as VR&E approaches the cap limit each year, they must slow down or delay delivery of independent living services for new cases until the start of the next fiscal year. While VR&E may not bump up against the cap every year, they have in some years and at those times veterans with severe disabilities who have been determined eligible and entitled to the VR&E program in the mid to late summer have had to wait until October to receive full services. It is absolutely time for this cap to be eliminated.

S. 2889, the "Veterans Health Care Act"

PVA supports the designated sections of S. 2889 being considered. We would refer the Committee to our comments regarding S. 2617 as it relates to Section 8 of this proposed legislation.

S. 2938, the "Enhancement of Recruitment, Retention, and Readjustment Through Education Act"

While PVA sees some merit in portions of the proposed legislation, we generally oppose this legislation because we do not believe that it accomplishes our goal of returning the GI Bill to the level established following World War II. We cannot argue with any legislation that intends to increase the rates of educational assistance available to service members and veterans. Furthermore, we generally support the idea of transferability of GI Bill benefits to a dependent; however, we believe that this opportunity should be offered to any service member or veteran eligible for GI Bill benefits, not just those who have served a minimum of six years.

However, we oppose the legislation for several reasons. First, we fundamentally disagree with the notion that realigning the GI Bill with the post-World War II benefit would negatively impact retention. It is a shame that honorable service establishing eligibility for GI Bill benefits is no longer sufficient under the guise of this legislation. This legislation implies that if a service member is not willing to consider extended service or a career in the military, then the federal government should have less of an obligation to provide him or her with an education. As such, we wholeheartedly disagree with the concept that the legislation advances which forces retention on service members in order to take advantage of an increased benefit level.

Moreover, the GI Bill is a recruitment tool. With a good benefit comes improved recruiting. Unfortunately, this legislation ignores that fact. Meanwhile, it seeks to create different classes of veterans simply based on the length of their service and the benefits to which they would be eligible. PVA has long opposed any suggestion that one veteran's service is any more honorable than another veteran's service simply because he or she served longer.

The "Veterans Benefits Enhancement Act"

PVA cannot offer a specific position on the proposed "Veterans Benefits Enhancement Act." However, we would like to express serious concern with a couple of provisions included in the legislation-Section 201 and 202. PVA opposes these provisions of the legislation. Both provisions are intended to allow the Secretary to ignore decisions by the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (the Court) while they seek appeal to the Federal Circuit or legislation to overturn a court decision. The Secretary has an adequate remedy in situations where he believes the Court has issued a decision contrary to law or which otherwise adversely affects the "integrity of the program." He can simply seek the authority from the Court to stay cases before the agency where it is believed appropriate or seek expedited review by the Federal Circuit. If a particular court decision truly threatened the "integrity of a program," the Courts would almost

certainly give the Secretary's view due consideration. As it stands, we are unaware of any similar federal agency which has legislative authority to ignore court decisions. Such authority would be extraordinary.

PVA appreciates the efforts of this Committee to address the many benefits available to the men and women who have served and sacrificed so much for this country. We is pleased that the Committee has chosen to make education benefits for service members and veterans a central them of the legislation on the agenda. We look forward to working with you to advance these measures through the Congress so that service members, veterans and their families can begin to take advantage of these meaningful changes.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.