



Statement by Mr. John L. Stonecipher, President and CEO, Guidance Aviation

Guidance Aviation has been training pilots for over 18 years. The overwhelming majority of our graduates have gone on to successful careers as helicopter pilots throughout the industry. I am proud of the scores of Veterans that have gone through our collegiate programs. These men and women served their country and used the GI Bill (they earned) to train as Commercial Pilots. Our graduates have achieved high-paying jobs with unprecedented levels of career placement. Flight training is a valuable and financially rewarding career option for Veterans.

Legislation currently in front of Congress will dramatically reduce Veteran's benefits for those who plan to become professional pilots.

The cost of flight training in a 2-year program is reasonable when compared to a 4-year University degree. An August 26, 2015 CBO Cost Estimate for H.R. 475 found that "In 2014, VA paid an average of \$42,000 [per year] in tuition and fees for all beneficiaries enrolled in flight-training programs at public institutions."

Given the high demand and high salaries for helicopter pilots, I believe the cost of training is easily justified. For example, an April 2015 study completed by Elliott D. Pollack & Company stated: "...the median pay for helicopter pilots is significantly higher than the median earnings of persons with a bachelor's degree." "While most helicopter training is a two-year program which coincides with an associate's degree, the resulting salaries of helicopter pilots more closely resemble that of an earner of a more advanced degree."

Pollack & Company went on to state: "The additional income paid to helicopter pilots provides many benefits throughout the national, state and local economies. The average wage of a helicopter pilot is estimated at \$85,000 per year compared to \$44,616 for the average wage of a private sector employee. This additional income results in higher federal income tax payments and higher sales tax revenue to state and local governments from additional consumer spending."

By its very nature, flight training is expensive. Initial aircraft purchase costs and direct operating costs such as fuel and maintenance are high. Another factor contributing to high flight training costs is the one-on-one instructor requirement. Most college courses place thirty or more students in a classroom, whereas flight training requires one instructor and one student per aircraft.

The Yellow Ribbon Program will not work for collegiate flight training. The Yellow Ribbon Program only works at colleges where the Veteran is added to an existing class. This is because the incremental cost for adding a student to an existing class is minimal. Conversely, the incremental cost for adding a student into an aircraft with a flight instructor is cost prohibitive. Looking at the VA's Yellow Ribbon website, none of the current private institutions under the existing cap of \$20,000 per year allow the



Yellow Ribbon Program to cover flight training. Public colleges cannot and will not absorb these added costs under the Yellow Ribbon Program.

Federal financial aid and student loans are simply not available to cover college tuition plus flight training.

Reducing Veterans benefits for flight training is counter to the intent of the GI Bill's mission to provide meaningful education and training programs for Veterans. Furthermore, it is unfair to discriminate against Veterans who have planned to use their benefits to become professional pilots.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill is the only reasonable option for a Veteran to fund an education to become a professional pilot. Veterans depend on the Post 9/11 GI Bill to be reintegrated into the workforce. With the proposed limits on flight training, the ability for Veterans to pursue an aviation career would be essentially eliminated.

Rather than imposing an unreasonable and arbitrary cap on flight training, the VA should focus on stopping abuses and impose real cost savings measures such as requiring extensive use of simulation and eliminating excessive course repeats.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John L. Stonecipher', is positioned above the name and title.

John L. Stonecipher
President/CEO, Guidance Aviation