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Prepared Statement

of

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Before the

Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs

“Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements
Act of 2010”

July 21, 2010

Good afternoon, Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and esteemed members of the Committee. I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the potential improvements to the Post-9/11 GI Bill as proposed in S. 3447, “Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010,” and related bills.

As I stated earlier this year in testimony, post Service education benefits have been a cornerstone of our military recruiting efforts since 1985, and a major contributor to the success of the All-Volunteer Force. Money for education has been and remains at the forefront of reasons young Americans cite for joining the military. There is no doubt that the Post-9/11 GI Bill will continue to have this impact and we are seeing that happen -- with unprecedented recruiting success.

For today’s hearing, you asked me to comment on S. 3447, “Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010” and related bills. S. 3447 offers a series of changes to chapter 33, title 38, United States Code. Since both funding and administration of the Post-9/11 GI Bill fall under the purview of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), I will focus my

comments on those changes that will affect the Department of Defense (DoD) and generally defer to VA to provide responses on those with no significant DoD impacts.

S. 3447, “Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010”

Section 2. Modification of Entitlement to Educational Assistance.

Subsection (a) makes changes to the definition of qualifying active duty for Post-9/11 GI Bill entitlement and appears to correct omissions in the original statute. As written, this sub-section would include as qualifying active duty the full-time National Guard duty currently eligible for either the Montgomery GI Bill or the Reserve Educational Assistance Program. DoD does not object to this section, provided Congress identifies appropriate and acceptable offsets for the additional benefits costs. DoD supports equivalent benefits for equivalent service and this change would meet that goal. This subsection also makes a technical correction to the definition of entry level and skill level training for the Army by adding One Station Unit Training (OSUT), a specific form of entry level training without a break between Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training. DoD is already reporting OSUT as entry level training and supports this technical correction.

Subsection (b) clarifies that all separations must be characterized as “honorable” to be eligible for Post-9/11 GI Bill entitlement. DoD supports this provision.

Subsection (c) excludes the statutory period of service incurred by graduates of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) as qualifying active duty for Post-9/11 GI Bill entitlement. This aligns graduates of the USCGA with graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, the U.S. Naval Academy, and the U.S. Air Force Academy. DoD believes this provision provides equity across the Armed Services and supports the provision.

Section 3. Modification of Amount of Assistance and Types of Approved Programs of Education.

This section modifies the amount of assistance and types of programs eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. DoD defers to VA, the agency responsible for administration and funding of the program, for a response.

Section 4. Modification of Assistance for Licensure and Certification Tests.

This section expands and makes changes to the entitlement charge for licensing and certification tests. Again, DoD defers to VA for a response.

Section 5. Transfer of Entitlement to Supplemental Educational Assistance to Post-9/11 Educational Assistance.

This section appears to change the procedure for payment of Supplemental Educational Assistance earned under the provisions sub-chapter III, chapter 30, 38 U.S. Code for individuals who choose to convert from the MGIB to the Post-9/11 GI Bill from a single payment each

academic term to a monthly payment in conjunction with the monthly stipend. Since this procedural change could have an impact on the administration of Post-9/11 GI Bill we would defer to VA, the agency responsible for administration and funding of the program, for a response.

Section 6. Transfer of Unused Education Benefits to Family Members.

The Administration is still reviewing the section and will not determine an Administration position on this section until VA completes a cost estimate for the entire bill. We will provide written views once the cost estimate is complete.

Section 7. Limitations on Receipt of Educational Assistance under National Call to Service (NCS) and Other Programs of Educational Assistance.

The section clarifies that VA administered educational assistance benefits-under the NCS enlistment option cannot be used simultaneous with any other VA administered educational assistance program, thus aligning NCS with other VA administered programs. DoD defers to VA, the agency responsible for administration and funding of the program for comment.

Sections 8, 9, 10, and 11 have no impact on DoD; therefore, we defer to VA for comment.

Of the other bills listed on the agenda, only S. 3389 has any impact on DoD. This bill would change the 48-month rule for Service members or Veterans with four years or more of active service who also received educational benefits through either the Montgomery GI Bill – Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR, chapter 1606, 10 USC) or the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP, chapter 1607, 10 USC.) The 48-month rule limits Service members or Veterans with eligibility under more than one VA administered education programs from receiving more than 48 months of educational assistance. While this provision could have minor impact on usage of MGIB-SR and REAP, the major fiscal impact would be increased usage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Therefore, DoD defers to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the agency responsible for administration and funding of the program for comment.

Today, the military stands ready, willing, and able to defend our nation, as well as its values and principles. Our young Servicemembers, all volunteers, are deployed across the globe, many in harm's way. Post Service education benefits have been a major contributor to recruiting achievements over the past 25 years. Additionally, these post service education benefits have been an invaluable asset to thousands of veterans, providing them with funding to enhance their education and increase their employability and income-earning opportunities, while assisting their transition to civilian life. The Department of Defense is an "education" employer. We hire educated young people, invest in them while in Service, and we encourage them to invest further in themselves when they leave. The VA-administered education benefits, and in particular the Post-9/11 GI Bill, facilitate that investment.

Few things, if any, are more important to the Secretary and to the Services than recruiting and retention. We recognize our duty to man the All-Volunteer Force with high-quality, motivated, and well-trained young men and women. The Post-9/11 GI Bill remains a key to our success. As

we move forward in the 21st Century, we must seize the opportunity to build on the remarkable legacy given to us by the visionaries who crafted each preceding version of the GI Bill. I thank this Committee for its unflagging support of the men and women who serve, or who have served, in providing for the national defense. I look forward to your questions.