

TERRY W. HARTLE, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

STATEMENT OF TERRY W. HARTLE
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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
ON
IMPROVEMENTS TO THE POST-9/11 GI BILL

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Chairman Akaka, Sen. Burr and the members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to present the views of American colleges and universities and express our strong support for S. 3447, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010. My organization, the American Council on Education (ACE), represents the entirety of American higher education. Since our founding in 1918 as an emergency council to ensure the U.S. had a ready supply of technically trained military personnel in World War I, ACE has been actively involved in meeting the postsecondary education needs of America's service members and veterans.

Today, ACE annually evaluates hundreds of military courses and occupations. In addition to publishing the results of these evaluations in the Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services, ACE collaborates with the Department of Defense (DOD) to detail this work on nationally recognized transcripts for members of the Army, Army National Guard, Navy and Marine Corps. The registry for these transcripts holds the records of more than 6 million service members who request approximately 200,000 transcripts per year that are sent to more than 2,200 accredited institutions of higher education.

With the recent challenges facing our nation at home and abroad, there has been renewed focus on ensuring that service members and veterans have access to and the opportunity to succeed in higher education. I'm proud to say that ACE has launched several initiatives in this area, both before and after passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. In 2007, ACE launched a program to assist severely injured service members and their families in making the transition from patient to civilian to student and to date, more than 580 injured veterans and their family members have become actively engaged in postsecondary education as a result of this initiative.

In 2009, ACE launched its Serving Those Who Serve initiative, a multi-year effort designed to effect major changes in how veterans learn about their education benefits and postsecondary options and how institutional leaders can build capacity to serve veterans on their campuses. As part of this effort, ACE partnered with the Walmart Foundation to award \$2 million in funding to 20 institutions across the U.S. that operate model programs advancing access and success in higher education for veterans and their families.

And this year, ACE, with the generous support of The Kresge Foundation, presented the Veteran Success Jam, a three-day online brainstorming session that brought together nearly 3,000

veterans and their families, service members, campus leaders and representatives of nonprofit organizations and government agencies to discuss the opportunities and barriers facing veterans in higher education. The Jam will help to inform and shape ACE's future work on behalf of service members and veterans.

These efforts are merely the tip of the iceberg. Higher education has eagerly embraced the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the promise it represents. Postsecondary institutions have worked hard to reach out to veterans, not only welcoming them onto campus, but ensuring that institutions adapt to best meet veterans' specific needs. At ACE we have been fortunate to work with hundreds of institutions on veterans' education issues and I want to cite just three examples.

There's Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey, which convened a task force that published a 70-page report to guide campus policies and procedures for student veterans. When GI Bill payments were delayed, FDU allowed veterans to enroll in classes without the appropriate paperwork, understanding that it would arrive eventually.

Hunter College School of Social Work, which is part of the City University of New York system, established a program at five local community colleges, training social work graduate students and peer mentors to help veterans navigate benefits and services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and community agencies. When GI Bill checks did not arrive, the graduate students and peer mentors quickly directed veterans to emergency funds and the campus food pantry.

Clackamas Community College in Oregon recognized the need to work closely with the Oregon National Guard and local community resources to help veterans transition to the civilian world. Clackamas welcomed more than 3,000 National Guard members and veterans to campus for a career and benefit fair, offering all-day childcare while free services and workshops were provided.

We are proud of the work of these institutions, and thousands others like them, to help ease the transition from soldier to student.

As a result of our extensive work in this area, I believe we are well-positioned to comment on the impact of student veterans and college campuses of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which we believe harkens back to the intent of the original GI Bill.

Despite the Post-9/11 GI Bill's marked improvement over previous education benefits, some provisions have complicated institutions' ability to implement the law and have resulted in inaccurate payments and a labor intensive process. The bill this Committee is considering today addresses the major issues that have arisen, and we believe that it will help fulfill Congress's intent and will allow institutions of higher education to better serve America's veterans.

As we see it, S. 3447 provides three distinct improvements to the existing bill. It will:

1. Provide greater clarity and accuracy on available benefits, enabling veterans to better plan their educational paths and make more informed decisions.
2. Ensure true equity for all those who have served this country.

3. Simplify benefit schedules and administration, reducing bureaucracy and institutional costs, while improving the service offered to veteran students.

In particular, the proposed legislation's intent to eliminate the confusing state tuition and fee caps is laudable. The widely varying state caps have resulted in an extremely cumbersome and inaccurate process that has caused frustration and anxiety on the part of the VA, institutions and student veterans. ACE supports the intent of the legislation to fully cover the cost of public institutions while setting a national baseline for private institutions.

However, the terminology set forth in Section 3 references a data set determined by the National Center for Education Statistics. As currently worded, the referenced baseline is flawed, ambiguous and will likely cause a great deal of confusion while reducing current education benefits in almost half of the states. To keep simplification at the forefront of this process, ACE recommends further review of this language to ensure the vocabulary meets the intent of the legislation. Another possible avenue would be to reference a set number as the baseline, with a determined annual increase.

We would ask that the Committee carefully consider the method by which any national average is determined. While such a provision would greatly simplify the calculation of benefits and has been well-received by colleges and universities, the level set could have a significant impact on those veterans attending private, nonprofit institutions. Moving to a national number would mean that veteran students at some of these institutions will receive a lower tuition/fee benefit than they do today. Either the student will have to make up the difference or the institution will have to expand its Yellow Ribbon agreement in order to do so, with a potential negative impact on veteran students' education options.

ACE also supports S. 3447's intent to clarify the eligibility of National Guard members who have honorably served their country on active duty including at the site of natural disasters and troops serving in the Active Guard Reserve. Additionally, the expansion of the benefit to include vocational schools, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training harkens back to the inclusionary World War II GI Bill benefit, which recognized the need for both a traditional college education as well as work force training.

This bill does much to streamline the delivery of benefits to veterans, and we encourage the Committee to keep ease of implementation in the forefront of their decision making. We know from experience that student needs are best met when campuses are consulted, and we appreciate this chance to share our views today. We encourage Congress and the VA to continue this dialogue with colleges and universities as the bill advances.

As we approach the 10th year of the Partnership for Veterans Education, a collaborative effort between higher education and veterans organizations, ACE stands eager and committed to continue working cooperatively to ensure our nation's returning veterans have access to and success in higher education. The Partnership for Veterans Education met recently to discuss common goals and concerns surrounding the Post-9/11 GI Bill. While we have noted some specific concerns to higher education institutions in this testimony that warrant further discussion, the Partnership supports the intent of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and S 3447: to provide

those who have served their country the best possible opportunity for postsecondary education as a way of facilitating their transition from military to civilian life.

Finally, in drafting S. 3447, Chairman Akaka has taken laudable steps to address cost implications that may arise from passage of this bill. While this bill has yet to be scored, the inclusion of offsets and other provisions to mitigate possible costs demonstrates a commitment to meet the needs of veterans in a fiscally responsible way.

In conclusion, on behalf of our 1,800 member colleges and universities, as well as the American Association of Community Colleges, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the Association of American Universities, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, and the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, we strongly urge the Committee to support S. 3447, and we thank you for your efforts to strengthen this critical legislation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have, and welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee going forward.