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STATEMENT OF
THOMAS J. PAMPERIN,
ASSOCIATE DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY FOR
POLICY AND PROGRAM MANAGEMENT,
VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION,
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to be here today to provide the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) views on pending legislation. Also testifying this morning is Dr. Robert Jesse, Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, Veterans Health Administration, and accompanying us are Assistant General Counsels Richard J. Hipolit and Walter A. Hall.

I will not be able to address a few of the bills on today's agenda because we did not have sufficient time to develop and coordinate the Administration's position and cost estimates, but with your permission we will provide that information in writing for the record. Those bills are S. 3286, S. 3314, S. 3325, S. 3330, S. 3348, S. 3352, S. 3355, S. 3367, S. 3368, S. 3370, and Senator Burr's draft bill to improve VA's multifamily transitional housing program. Similarly, for most of the bills that I will address on today's agenda, we request permission to provide cost estimates for the record at a later date.

S. 1780

S. 1780, the "Honor America's Guard-Reserve Retirees Act," would deem certain persons (namely, former members of the National Guard or Reserves who are entitled under chapter 1223 of title 10, United States Code, to retired pay for nonregular service or who would be entitled to such retired pay but for their age) who have not otherwise performed "qualifying active duty service" to have been on active duty for purposes of VA benefits.

Under current law, a National Guard or Reserve member is considered to have served on active duty only if the member was called to active duty under title 10, United States Code, and completed the period of duty for which he or she was called to service. Eligibility for some VA benefits, such as disability compensation, pension, and dependency and indemnity compensation, requires a period of "active military, naval, or air service," which may be satisfied by active duty, or by certain periods of active duty for training and inactive duty training during which the servicemember becomes disabled or dies. Generally, those periods are: (1) active duty for training during which the member was disabled or died from disease or injury incurred or aggravated in line of duty; and (2) inactive duty training during which the member was disabled or died from an injury incurred or aggravated in line of duty.

S.1780 would eliminate these service requirements for National Guard or Reserve members who served in such a capacity for at least 20 years. Retirement status alone would make them eligible

for all VA benefits, despite not having served on active duty or in active service or, if called to active duty, not having served the minimum active-duty period required for eligibility.

VA does not support this bill. Current benefits eligibility is based either on active duty or a qualifying period of active service during which a member was physically engaged in serving the Nation in an active military role. Active service is the foundation for providing VA benefits. In recent years, the National Guard and Reserves have played an important role in our Nation's overseas conflicts. Virtually all those who served in recent conflicts were called to active duty, which qualifies them as Veterans and provides potential eligibility for VA benefits. This bill, however, would extend the same status to those who were never called to active duty and did not suffer disability or death due to active duty for training or inactive duty training, and hence do not have active service. VA would be obligated to provide compensation and health-care for disabilities resulting from injuries incurred in civilian activities, as well as from diseases that develop, during the 20 years that count toward retirement, regardless of any relationship to actual active duty or training drills. Providing compensation and other VA benefits based solely on retirement status would be inconsistent with VA's mission of providing benefits to Veterans who earned them as a result of active service.

Statutes already authorize memorial benefits (burial in national cemeteries, burial flags, and grave markers) to this group of individuals. Therefore, S. 1780 would not provide any additional benefit related to the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), nor would it present any additional budget concerns related to the benefits NCA provides.

S. 1866

S. 1866 would extend eligibility for burial in a national cemetery to the parents of certain Veterans, provided that VA determines that space is available in open national cemeteries and that the Veteran does not have a spouse, surviving spouse, or child who has been buried or who, if deceased, would be eligible for burial in a national cemetery under 38 U.S.C. § 2402(5). Although the bill is apparently intended to apply to the parents of deceased Veterans, as drafted it would also apply to the parents of living Veterans, as well as to the parents of service members and other individuals eligible for burial in national cemeteries. Currently, only parents who are eligible in their own right as a Veteran or spouse of a Veteran are eligible for burial in a national cemetery. While VA cannot support this bill as currently drafted, we would support this bill if it were modified to allow for burial of parents only in cases involving the death of an unmarried and childless servicemember who died due to combat or training-related injuries.

On October 8, 2009, VA provided testimony to the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorials Affairs, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, on a similar bill, H.R. 761. At the request of that Committee, VA provided technical assistance clarifying the impact of provisions of the bill. The amended bill, which addressed VA concerns, was incorporated into H.R. 3949 as section 303, the "Corey Shea Act." The House of Representatives passed that bill on November 3, 2009, and it was sent to the Senate and referred to this Committee.

As VA testified regarding H.R. 761, the primary reason we do not support S. 1866 is our concern that, by extending eligibility for national cemetery burial to parents, this bill would reduce the number of gravesites available for Veterans, who have served our Nation. We believe that

preserving sufficient burial space for Veterans should take priority over extending burial eligibility to others.

We also note that the definition of "parent" in 38 U.S.C. § 101(5) is broad enough that more than two individuals could qualify for burial as the parent of a particular Veteran. Birth parents, adoptive parents, step parents, and foster parents could be eligible for burial under this bill as currently drafted.

Furthermore, the Secretary already may permit the burial of a Veteran's parents in a national cemetery. Section 2402(6) of title 38, United States Code, which permits the Secretary to designate "other persons or classes of persons" as eligible for burial, authorizes the Secretary to permit the burial of parents in a national cemetery. In 2007 and 2008, the Secretary approved two separate requests for the burial of a parent in the same grave as an unmarried, childless servicemember who died as a result of wounds incurred in combat. Neither deceased servicemember had a spouse or child who was buried or would be eligible for burial in a national cemetery.

VA would support legislation adopting similar burial eligibility criteria for parents to address the small number of compelling cases in which an unmarried servicemember without children dies due to combat or training-related injuries. By using Department of Defense Casualty Offices' records, VA would be able to determine whether a deceased servicemember died as a result of combat or training-related injuries and whether the servicemember has a surviving spouse or child eligible for burial. This narrower proposal, to extend to parents eligibility for burial in the same gravesite with their child, would allay our concern that extending eligibility to parents would reduce the number of national cemetery gravesites available for Veterans. VA would, therefore, support a modified version of S. 1866 to formally and publicly recognize the ultimate sacrifice of fallen servicemembers and the unique burden of their surviving parents without negatively impacting burial access for qualified Veterans. VA would be glad to provide technical support should the Committee request it in order to modify the bill.

If S. 1866 as currently drafted were enacted, VA would incur estimated costs of $27,000 in the first year, $180,000 over five years, and $462,000 over ten years.

S. 1939

S. 1939, the "Agent Orange Equity Act of 2009," would expand the category of Veterans who are afforded a presumption of service connection for certain diseases by 38 U.S.C. § 1116(a) and a presumption of exposure to certain herbicide agents by section 1116(f). It would essentially change the category from Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam during a specified period to Veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam during that period, including the inland waterways of, ports and harbors of, the waters offshore, and the airspace above the Republic of Vietnam. It would also extend the presumptions to Veterans who served on Johnston Island during the period from April 1, 1972, through September 30, 1977, or who received the Vietnam Service Medal or the Vietnam Campaign Medal. All of these changes would be effective as of September 25, 1985.

Under VA's regulation implementing section 1116, 38 C.F.R. § 3.307(a)(6)(iii), "service in the Republic of Vietnam" includes service in the waters offshore and service in other locations if the

conditions of service involved duty or visitation in the Republic of Vietnam. While the presumption of herbicide exposure already extends to Veterans with duty or visitation on the ground in Vietnam or on its inland waterways, S. 1939 would greatly increase the number of Veterans eligible for service connection of the diseases presumed associated with herbicide exposure to include many Veterans whose service would not have placed them at risk of exposure to herbicides. Those who would be included under the bill include Veterans who served aboard naval vessels operating on open offshore waters far from the coastline of Vietnam; Veterans who served on high altitude jet aircraft flying missions over Vietnam airspace; Veterans who served on Johnston Island in the Pacific Ocean between April 1, 1972, and September 30, 1977, where unused herbicide agents were stored and ultimately disposed of; and Veterans who served in Thailand, Laos, or Cambodia, or the airspace above those nations, in support of the war effort in Vietnam.

VA does not support this bill. The intended purpose of legislation codified at 38 U.S.C. § 1116 was to provide a presumption of herbicide exposure for Veterans who may have been exposed to tactical military herbicide use within the Republic of Vietnam and to provide presumptive service connection for certain diseases associated with this potential exposure. Extensive aerial spraying of Agent Orange and other herbicide agents in Vietnam between 1962 and 1971 is well documented. This tactical herbicide use was aimed at destroying enemy food crops, removing jungle cover from enemy positions, and providing defoliated free fire zones around U.S. bases to discourage enemy attacks. Because of the difficulty of determining which military units or individual service members may have been directly exposed, the presumption was extended to all Veterans who served within the country or on its inland waterways. Any of these Veterans may have been exposed, and that justifies extending the presumption to them. However, the same cannot be said of the categories of Veterans who would be added by this bill.

Herbicides were not sprayed over the open offshore waters of Vietnam, and high-altitude jet aircraft had no contact with the herbicides sprayed by low-altitude propeller-driven cargo planes. On Johnston Island, herbicides were stored in a remote fenced-in security area with limited access for military personnel. Receipt of the Vietnam Service Medal or Vietnam Campaign Medal for war effort support in Thailand, Laos, or Cambodia is not related to the potential for exposure to tactical herbicide use in Vietnam itself.

S.1939 would thus provide a presumption of herbicide exposure to Veterans who were not exposed to tactical military herbicide use. This would create an inequity in that Veterans who were not exposed would be afforded the same favorable presumption as those who were or may have been exposed. S. 1939 would essentially change the basis for the presumption from service in an area of documented herbicide use to any service that supported the war effort in Southeast Asia.

In summary, VA does not support this bill because it would expand the presumption of herbicide exposure to categories of Veterans who were not exposed to the tactical herbicides used in Vietnam. It would undermine the original Congressional intent of providing health care and disability compensation to deserving Veterans whose diseases are presumptively associated with herbicide exposure during Vietnam service.

S. 1940

S. 1940 would require the Secretary to complete a study of the effects on children of exposure of their parents to herbicides used in support of military operations in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam era. While VA supports a greater scientific understanding of the effects on children of parents exposed to herbicides in Vietnam, VA does not support S. 1940 because it would be extremely difficult at this time to assemble data for such a study that would result in a scientifically valid outcome.

In 2008, the Institute of Medicine's (IOM's) Committee to Review the Health Effects in Vietnam Veterans of Exposure to Herbicides conducted a preliminary assessment of the question of paternally mediated, trans-generational effects and suggested that epidemiologic studies of adult offspring would be difficult. The challenges of such a study include developing methods and techniques to track and locate subjects across multiple generations and accounting for diverse health effects.

Viewing the proposed study that would be required by S. 1940 in light of the IOM's findings, we believe that identifying, locating, and obtaining consent to participate from the offspring of Vietnam Veterans and the adult offspring of the Vietnam-era Veterans that would be needed for comparison would be very difficult. As we are unaware of any directory or listing of Vietnam Veterans' children, the logistics of this study would require a multi-year effort inconsistent with the one-year time frame the bill would require for reporting on VA's findings. Even with a successful effort to contact and enroll appropriate individuals into the proposed study, there would most likely not be a sufficient number to allow for scientifically valid estimates of the trans-generational effect of paternal exposure.

For these reasons, VA believes that the study and report that S. 1940 would require are not feasible. We estimate that the cost of conducting the study would be approximately $6.3 million over five years.

S. 2751

S. 2751 would designate the VA medical center in Big Spring, Texas, as the George H. O'Brien, Jr., Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Mr. O'Brien was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in battle in Korea and, following service, volunteered at the VA medical center in Big Spring. He died in 2005. We defer to Congress in the naming of Federal property in honor of individuals.

S. 3035

S. 3035, the "Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Care Improvement Act of 2010," would require the Secretary to submit to Congress a report on the feasibility and advisability of establishing a Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center or Polytrauma Network Site for VA in the northern Rockies or the Dakotas.

VA shares the concern for providing treatment facilities for polytrauma in this region and has already completed an assessment of need. VA has determined that an enhanced Polytrauma Support Clinic Team with a strong telehealth component at the Ft. Harrison, Montana, VA facility would meet the needs and the workload volume of Veterans with mild to moderate traumatic brain injury (TBI) residing in the catchment area of the Montana Healthcare System. It would also facilitate access to TBI rehabilitation care for other Veterans from the northern Rockies and the Dakotas through telehealth. However, establishment of a Polytrauma

Rehabilitation Center or Polytrauma Network Site, which would focus on the treatment of moderate to severe TBI, is not feasible or advisable in this area based on the needs of the population served. Because of the action already being taken by VA, this bill is not necessary, and we do not support it.

The estimated cost of staffing the Polytrauma Support Clinic Team at Ft. Harrison would be $1 million in the first year, $6.1 million for five years, and approximately $13 million over 10 years.

Mr. Chairman, we would be pleased to provide the Committee with more detailed information about our findings and decisions regarding the northern Rockies and the Dakotas.

S. 3107

S. 3107, the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2010," would provide an increase for the rates of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation by a percentage commensurate with the annual Social Security cost-of-living adjustment, effective December 1, 2010.

VA supports this bill, which is consistent with the President's FY 2011 budget request. This legislation is necessary to guard the affected benefits against any eroding effects of inflation. The worthy recipients of these benefits deserve no less.

Current economic assumptions project no increase in the cost-of-living. If that assumption holds true, there would be no benefit costs associated with this bill, nor would there be an administrative cost.

S. 3192

S. 3192, the "Fair Access to Veterans Benefits Act of 2010," would require the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (Veterans Court) to extend "for such time as justice may require" the 120-day period for appealing a Board decision to the Veterans Court upon a showing of good cause. It would apply to a notice of appeal filed with respect to a Board decision issued on or after July 24, 2008. It would require the reinstatement of any "petition for review" that the Veterans Court dismissed as untimely on or after that date if, within 6 months of enactment, an adversely affected person files another petition and shows good cause for filing the first petition on the date it was filed.

Although VA supports the extension of the 120-day appeal period under certain circumstances, VA has several concerns with this bill. Because the bill would not limit the length of time the appeal period could be extended, appellants would potentially be able to appeal a Board decision at any time after it was issued—even decades later—as long as good cause is shown. This would create great uncertainty as to the finality of Board decisions, which could burden an already overburdened claim-adjudication system and create confusion as to whether a VA regional office, the Board, or the Veterans Court has jurisdiction over a claim.

Petitions for relief under the "good cause" provision could potentially add hundreds of cases to the Veterans Court's docket, which could increase the processing time for all cases in the court's inventory. The reinstatement of already dismissed untimely appeals could add even more cases.

In view of the open-ended and retroactive nature of the provision, the potential number of new appeals is impossible to quantify, but it might be enormous.

To avoid these and other potential problems resulting from an unlimited appeal period and retroactive application, the Administration is developing a proposal that would take a more focused approach. It would permit the Veterans Court to extend the appeal period for up to an additional 120 days from the expiration of the original 120-day appeal period upon a showing of good cause, provided the appellant files with the Veterans Court, within 120 days of expiration of the original 120-day period, a motion requesting extension. The proposal would ameliorate harsh results in extreme circumstances, e.g., if a claimant were mentally incapacitated during the entire 120-day appeal period, but by limiting how late an appellant could request extension and how long the period could be extended, would not unduly undermine the finality of Board decisions, which is necessary for efficient administrative functioning. Placing an outer limit on the appeal period would maintain the purpose of the rule of finality, which is to preclude repetitive and belated readjudication of Veterans' benefits claims.

In addition, the proposal would be applicable to Board decisions issued on or after the date of enactment and to Board decisions for which the 120-day period following the 120-day appeal period has not expired as of the date of enactment. It would provide a generous approach but one that is carefully crafted so as not to unduly increase the court's caseload and delay Veterans' receipt of timely final decisions on their appeals.
We estimate that enactment of VA's legislative proposal as contemplated would result in no significant costs or savings.

S. 3234
S. 3234, the "Veteran Employment Assistance Act of 2010," would create programs aimed at improving employment, training, and placement services furnished to Veterans, especially those serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Section 3(b) of the bill would require the Small Business Administration, VA, and the Department of Labor (DoL) to assess the efficacy of establishing a Federal direct loan program for small business concerns owned and controlled by Veterans and to submit to Congress a report on the assessment within 180 days of enactment. VA has no objection to this provision.

Section 7 of the bill would provide benefits for apprenticeship and on-the-job training (OJT) under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Section 7 would provide for payment of a monthly benefit to individuals pursuing full-time programs of apprenticeship or other OJT, using a graduated structure similar to that applicable for such training under other VA educational assistance programs, including the Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty (MGIB-AD) and Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR) programs and the Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance program. Section 7 also would amend current law to include apprenticeship or other OJT training programs as approved programs of education for purposes of the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Pursuant to section 7, for each of the first 6 months of an individual's pursuit of an apprenticeship or other OJT program, the individual would be paid 75 percent of the "monthly benefit payment otherwise payable to such individual" under chapter 33. For the second 6 months of such pursuit, the individual would be paid 55 percent of such amount, and for each of

the following months the individual would be paid 35 percent of such amount. In addition, this bill would authorize payment to such individuals of a monthly housing stipend equal to the monthly amount of the basic allowance for housing payable for a servicemember with dependents in pay grade E-5 residing in the military housing area that encompasses all or the majority portion of the ZIP code area in which the individual resides. We note that, unlike the monthly housing stipend authorized under 38 U.S.C. § 3313(c), this section contains no provision requiring payment of reduced amounts of such monthly stipend in cases where individuals' aggregated active-duty service is less than 36 months.

For each month an individual receives a benefit under this bill, VA would charge the individual's entitlement at a rate that reflects the applicable percentage (i.e., 75, 55, or 35 percent, as appropriate).

The amendments made by section 7 would take effect as if included in the enactment of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (Title V, Public Law 110-252). That is, the effective date would be August 1, 2009.

VA supports allowing individuals who qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill to receive benefits for OJT and apprenticeship training, subject to Congress's identifying offsets for any additional costs. However, VA cannot support enactment of this section as drafted.

The bill would provide a monthly assistance benefit, plus a monthly housing stipend amount to trainees. This would be in addition to any wages a trainee may receive. Further, as noted, this bill provides that the monthly benefit would be equal to a percentage "of the monthly benefit payment otherwise payable" to an individual under chapter 33. However, unlike the MGIB-AD, which provides for monthly payments of educational assistance other than monthly housing stipends, no "monthly" benefits are payable to a student or trainee under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. VA's payment of educational assistance under 38 U.S.C. § 3313 (for actual charges of an individual's tuition and fees) is made directly to the institution of higher learning on a lump-sum basis for the entire quarter, semester, or term. Thus, it is unclear to what monthly benefit the provision refers in order to determine the amount of any payment to an individual.

If enacted, this bill would take effect as if it had been included in Public Law 110-252, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008. VA would have to manually re-work all apprenticeship and OJT cases for individuals wishing to elect to receive assistance under the Post-9/11 GI Bill for training that occurred on or after August 1, 2009. VA is currently programming a new payment system to implement the provisions of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Full deployment of the new system is expected by December 2010. Incorporating new rules for the payment of benefits for apprenticeship and OJT training, as proposed, would require system changes that could not be accommodated, at the earliest, until after that date. Such changes would delay deployment of the new system and require VA to continue processing claims on a manual basis.

Section 8 of the bill would authorize VA, in consultation with DoL and the Department of the Interior, to establish a program to award grants to States to establish a "veterans conservation corps" (corps). Each State corps would be established within, or in affiliation with, the "veterans agency" of the State and would provide Veterans with volunteer and employment opportunities

in conservation projects that would provide for training, education, and certification in environmental restoration and management fields. These projects would include: (1) restoring natural habitat; (2) maintaining Federal, state, or local forest lands, parks and reserves, as well as other reservations, water, and outdoor lands; (3) maintaining and improving urban and suburban storm water management facilities and other water management facilities; and (4) carrying out hazardous materials and spills response, energy efficiency and other environmental maintenance, stewardship, and restoration projects.

Each corps, in order to incorporate training, education, and certification into the volunteer and employment opportunities afforded Veterans, would consult with: (1) State and local workforce investment boards; (2) local institutions of higher education, including community colleges; (3) private schools; (4) State or local agencies, including State employment agencies and State forest services; (5) labor organizations; (6) business involved in the environmental industry; and (7) such other entities as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs considers appropriate.

In order to assist Veterans enrolled in the program to obtain employment in the fields of environmental restoration and management, the corps would partner with one-stop centers, State and local workforce investment boards, and other State agencies. The corps would also assist Veterans, in conjunction with State and local workforce investment boards, to identify appropriate employment opportunities in their local communities that would use the skills developed while in the Armed Forces and facilitate internships or job shadowing. The corps would assist with, or provide, referrals for obtaining benefits available to Veterans and match Veterans with conservation projects that would be aligned with each Veteran's goals.

The grant amount that could be awarded to a State under the conservation corps program established by section 8 could not exceed $250,000 in any year.

Each State receiving a grant to establish a Veterans conservation corps program would be required to submit a report on the performance of the Veterans conservation corps in that State to VA and the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations and Veterans' Affairs. These reports would include a description of how the grant amount was used and an assessment of the performance of the corps, including a description of the Veterans' labor market in that State for the current and previous year.

VA supports efforts to expand volunteer and employment opportunities to Veterans, particularly with respect to environmental restoration and management. However, VA does not support the provision of these services through grant programs unless funds are expressly appropriated for this purpose. If each of the 50 States received the maximum grant, we estimate that $12.5 million would be needed annually. VA does not currently have a mechanism for awarding such grants and managing such grant programs, but DoL has extensive expertise and experience in managing grants to States. DoL's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) currently manages grants to States to provide employment services and outreach to Veterans at one-stop centers. The purpose and requirements of this bill appear to be a very good match with the current functionality of the VETS program.

Section 9 of the bill would authorize VA, in consultation with the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training, to establish a center of excellence to support research,

development, planning, implementation, and evaluation of methods for educational institutions to give academic credit for military experience and training to certain Veterans (those discharged or released from service within 48 months of application for admission to such institutions or those who were members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces).

Acting through the center of excellence, VA would award grants to, or enter into contracts with, eligible institutions to achieve the purposes of the center. An eligible institution for this purpose would be defined as any partnership that meets such requirements as VA promulgated and consists of an institution of higher education (IHE) and one or more of the following entities: (1) a community college; (2) a university teaching hospital; (3) a military installation, including a facility of the National Guard; (4) a VA medical center; and (5) a military medical treatment facility. VA could not award a grant or contract in an amount less than $2 million or more than $5 million.

To receive a grant or contract, an institution would be required to submit to VA an application for this purpose. VA would give priority to applicants who include as a partner an IHE or other educational institution that: (1) affords appropriate recognition to military experience and training in screening candidates; (2) has a practice of, or would establish a practice of (if proposing such a practice, would include with the application a review of such a plan by a professional organization) giving academic credit for military experience and training; (3) has established a professional development and delivery system using evidence-based practices; or (4) has demonstrated experience working with the Department of Defense or VA.

Each eligible institution receiving a grant or contract would be required to use it for one or more of the following purposes: (1) to develop or implement a plan to modify programs of education and admissions programs at IHEs to give academic credit to the Veterans and members described above; (2) to develop standards for the identification of military experience and training in individuals applying for enrollment at IHEs; (3) to train professors, educators, and instructors at IHEs on the means of best teaching students at such institutions with military experience and training; (4) to develop curriculum for IHEs that are appropriately tailored to individuals with military experience and training; (5) to develop admissions and recruitment guidelines for IHLs to attract Veterans and members described above and afford them recognition for military experience and training in their admissions processes; and (6) to establish a program, a method, or standards to be utilized by IHLs for assessing the education and training during the pursuit of a program of education and at the completion of such program.

Because the grants are to be used for admissions policies, recruitment, granting of prior credit, instruction of professors and other teaching staff, modifying the institution's existing programs of education, and suggesting modifications to curriculum, VA believes that the Department of Education, in consultation with VA and DoL, is best positioned to establish the center of excellence for the purposes of these grants. Therefore, we do not support enactment of this section.

Section 11 would require DoL, in consultation with VA and the Departments of Defense and Health and Human Services, to establish a program to enable transitioning military members to

build on the technical skills learned during military service to help them enter public health fields. VA defers to DoL regarding this program.

VA's Legislative Proposal

Although it is not on today's agenda, the Administration is developing a legislative proposal that would cover many health, benefits, and management issues. The legislative proposal would include provisions to: (1) revise vocational rehabilitation and education benefits to increase the utility of incentives for employers to provide on-the-job training to Veterans with service-connected disabilities; (2) promote greater efficiency in the approval of educational programs; (3) permit extension of the delimiting date for education benefits for a beneficiary serving as the primary caregiver of a seriously injured Veteran; and (4) provide Veterans Group Life Insurance participants who are insured for less than the maximum amount the opportunity to purchase additional coverage and make permanent the current authority to extend Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance coverage for two years to Veterans who are totally disabled when they leave service.

This concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to entertain any questions you or the other members of the Committee may have.