

Chairman Daniel K. Akaka

OPENING STATEMENT  
Hearing on Improvements to the Post-9/11 GI Bill  
July 21, 2010

Welcome to this hearing on the proposed Post-9/11 Veterans' Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010. As one of three current Senators who received benefits under the original GI Bill after World War II, I know first-hand the value of this program. That is why I was so pleased to join Senator Webb in cosponsoring the bill that created this important new education benefit which became effective on August 1st of last year.

We know that there is great value to this benefit for the veterans who are currently taking advantage of it. We have come to understand, however, that there are significant and complex issues relating to this new benefit package. Since the original legislation did not have the usual vetting by the Committee, it has come to light that there are number of provisions in need of modification. Keeping in mind that the goal is to have a streamlined program – for beneficiaries and administrators – a number of improvements are also in order so that benefits are delivered in a timely, accurate, and equitable way.

When I introduced my legislation, I intended for it to serve as a starting point for discussion about needed changes. That outcome has been realized. Veterans, servicemembers, institutions of higher learning, and many others have come forward with suggestions and ideas for improvements. It is important that we all work together to address the issues involved in a considered and deliberate way. What we will hear this morning will help us continue toward that goal.

I stress, however, that this legislation will not mark a stopping point for work on the new GI Bill. Through the discourse generated by the introduction of this bill, additional concerns have been raised. These include addressing fraud and abuse and ensuring that only programs offering legitimate education and training are approved for benefits. Another important issue is the eligibility for benefits for other members of the Guard and Reserve. These are important issues, but it is vital that we move now to put the proposed streamlining and operational improvements in place as soon as possible. As Chairman, I will continue to work on the remaining concerns.

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