

STATEMENT OF
CARLOS FUENTES, DIRECTOR
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

FOR THE RECORD

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

“H.R. 3965 and draft bill entitled, “To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements to the use of educational assistance provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for flight training programs”

WASHINGTON, D.C.

October 11, 2017

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke and members of the subcommittee, on behalf of the men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and its Auxiliary, thank you for the opportunity to present our views on legislation pending before the subcommittee.

H.R. 3965, Veterans Armed For Success Act

The VFW has serious concerns with this legislation, which would authorize VA to provide grants to organizations who assist veterans with resume assistance, interview training, and job recruitment training, and related services to assist veterans in obtaining employment.

The VFW has a strong working relationship with VA and the Department of Labor Veterans Employment Service (DOL-VETS). While VA administers several programs to ensure veterans have successful and meaningful careers after leaving military service, the VFW believes that direct employment services should continue to be administered by DOL-VETS. That is why we are concerned that this bill would require VA to administer a new program rather than build on existing programs administered by DOL-VETS.

Furthermore, the VFW believes that this legislation would duplicate and impede efforts by DOL-VETS to assist recently discharged veterans obtain employment through its Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) program. Organizations that would like to assist veterans in obtaining meaningful post-military careers should visit a local American Jobs Center and partner with a

Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist or a Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER). Through the JVSG program, DVOPs and LVERs across the country work to connect employers seeking to hire veterans and veterans qualified to fill such positions. This includes providing the same services required by this legislation, but also ensure veterans are connected with permanent jobs, which this legislation would not do.

Instead this legislation would authorize organizations who receive grants to define what constitutes "careers". The VFW is concerned that allowing grant recipients to define what is a successful outcome would enable organization who receive grants to provide subpar services which fail to help veterans obtain meaningful careers. In fact, DOL-VETS ended a similar program called Veterans Workforce Investment Program because grantees were given large grants to help disabled veterans obtain employment, but were unable to meet objectives or delivered negligible outcomes. The VFW urges the subcommittee to improve DOL-VETS JVSG program instead of repeating past mistakes.

Draft Legislation to Use Educational Assistance Provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for Flight Training Programs

The VFW supports this legislation, which would place a cap on the amount of tuition and fees that may be paid under the Post-9/11 GI Bill for programs of education in which a public institution of higher education enters into an agreement with a private entity to provide such education. However, the VFW would like to suggest a recommendation to improve this legislation.

Currently, third party training programs that contract with public schools are able to charge unlimited fees since public schools have no set dollar amount cap. The law states only that the Post-9/11 GI Bill covers the actual cost of in-state tuition and fees. In the past couple years, it has come to light that some contracted flight training programs have charged exorbitant fees, which far exceeded the cost of an average in-state education, to profit from exploitation of this loophole. The VFW believes this loophole must be closed by placing a reasonable cap on these flight training programs.

Still, we believe that veterans should have a path to receive the training necessary to enter highly technical, high demand fields like aviation, which offer good paying jobs to those who are qualified. We also recognize that it may not be realistic for certain flight schools to provide that training within a \$22,805.34 cap per academic year. To mitigate this concern, this legislation would authorize VA to provide accelerated payments of twice the monthly entitlement amount for tuition and fees. Doing so would enable predatory institutions to continue to gouge VA and force veterans to forgo eligibility months simply because the cap for such programs is not sufficient.

For this reason, we urge the Subcommittee to authorize VA to determine what reasonable caps should be for flight training and similarly contracted training in other high demand fields, so that veterans can continue to have access to these kinds of programs, but ensure such programs offer transparency in their fee schedules and cannot simply charge the government an arbitrary rate.

To ensure VA does not set unreasonable caps on contracted programs, the VFW recommends requiring VA to seek congressional approval before proposed caps are implemented.

The VFW also continues to support strict enforcement of standing VA policies, which ensures that third party contractors and their partner schools are charging appropriate fees, while continuing to offer high quality training to veterans.

Information Required by Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives

Pursuant to Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, the VFW has not received any federal grants in Fiscal Year 2017, nor has it received any federal grants in the two previous Fiscal Years.

The VFW has not received payments or contracts from any foreign governments in the current year or preceding two calendar years.