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December 14, 2007

The Honorable Stephanie Herseth Sandlin  
House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity  
335 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Herseth Sandlin:

This letter is in response to your letter of December 10, 2007, in which you asked that the priorities we previously outlined (Dr. Kime's letter of October 24, 2007) be revisited in light of provisions included in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for 2008.

As a member of the Partnership for Veterans Education, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) appreciates your Committee's leadership. The provisions you have included in the NDAA correct some of the injustices in the GI Bill provisions of the Reserve Components. In the difficult pay-go environment, incremental improvements to the GI bill are probably what can be realistically expected. Given this reality, it is fitting that the unfairness to the Reserves was addressed first.

It is important that the Veterans and Armed Services Committees in the House and Senate recognize that very important work remains to be done to tailor the GI Bill to the contemporary, strategic, and educational environment. Some of the actions that need to be taken are not high-cost actions. The highest priority action that needs to be taken, reform of the basic architecture of the GI Bill, requires willingness to address entrenched political and budgetary authority more than it requires increased funding.

**Updating the legal, political, and budgetary architecture of the G.I. Bill is first priority** because we will not create a GI Bill appropriate to this century until we do this. As it stands, turf issues between Cabinet Departments and between Senate and House Committees get in the way of fulfilling the nation's responsibilities to veterans.

War fighting is the business of Department of Defense. Veterans are the responsibility of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Confusing these areas of responsibility and advocacy causes unfairness, conflicting policies, and failure to meet the nation's responsibilities. Bogus arguments are developed to justify the status quo. (One such argument is that an attractive GI Bill threatens retention rates.) Until the

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problems of conflicting jurisdictions are resolved, a GI Bill truly compatible with the nation's military commitments and its military deployment policies will not evolve. Our recommendations are listed below.

Recommendations on GI Bill "Architecture:"

- Place all G.I. Bill funding and administration in the Department of Veterans Affairs where veterans are first priority and advocacy for veterans does not compete with war fighting considerations.
- Structure G.I. Bill legislation to enable the Department of Veterans Affairs to function as the exclusive Cabinet-level advocate for veterans.
- Address DoD/DVA turf issues in Congress related to the G.I. Bill. The two Cabinet Departments cannot resolve the mixed-mission problems in education benefits if the Senate and House Committees and their staffs do not make changes.
- Pass the Total Force G.I. Bill to make educational benefits commensurate with the service that servicemembers perform.

**The next priority for the GI Bill is that it should actually cover the full cost of attending college.** The Partnership for Veterans Education has supported a very realistic benchmark for the GI Bill. It should, at a minimum, pay the costs of college at the average public institution. Meaningful progress has been made on making the GI Bill viable. Chapter 30 now covers about 75% of this benchmark. This is progress, but it is still not good enough.

Recommendations on funding the GI Bill:

- Benchmark the MGIB to the average cost of attendance at public 4-year institutions. A mandate is not required, but there should be annual reports to document progress toward meeting the goal.
- Proceed toward the benchmark with incremental raises to the G.I. Bill over a period of three years, as was done with G.I. Bill increases a few years ago.
- Ensure, by adopting the provisions of the Total Force GI Bill, that all servicemembers receive education stipends in proportion to their service.

**Finally, the administration of the GI Bill needs to be streamlined and modernized.** There are three facets of administrative and management reform that need attention. First, Contemporary Adult and Continuing Education theory and the concept of lifelong learning should be applied to the entire Total Force structure. Adult students go to college differently and study different things than even a decade ago. Second, Veterans Department support of veteran administrators at academic institutions is weak and needs to be shored up to ensure proper help to veteran students. Third, an outdated administrative culture dominates G.I. Bill management. The Department has not kept pace with the business world on how to manage accountability and money. Incorporating modern communication techniques and information technology advancements would increase efficiency, optimize resources, and enhance service to veterans.

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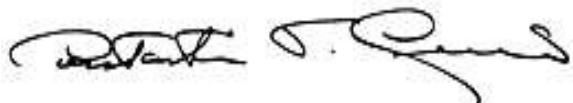
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Recommendations: Administration and Management

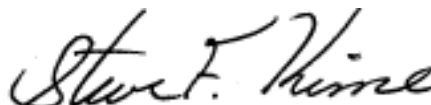
- A new Total Force G.I. Bill needs to include provisions for accelerated payments, high-tech programs, vocational options, realistic delimiting dates, and other ideas compatible with the modern adult educational landscape.
- Increase assistance to veteran administrators on campuses.
- Modernize management of the G.I. Bill.

Thank you for the opportunity comment on GI Bill priorities in light of provisions included in the NDAA for 2008.

Sincerely,



Constantine W. "Deno" Curris  
President



Steve Francis Kime  
Former Vice President