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Partnership for Veterans' Education

March 25, 2009

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The Partnership for Veterans Education, a unique consortium of military, veterans and higher education associations founded in 2000 to advocate for a new GI Bill in the 21st century, writes to offer our full support as you prepare for the implementation of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008. Just as the original GI Bill launched the "Greatest Generation" and unprecedented prosperity, this landmark legislation has the potential to propel this generation of service men and women toward the full measure of their individual potential.

As a matter of public policy, the Post-9/11 GI Bill is a forward-looking response to the nation's universally acknowledged need to expand access to postsecondary education to more of its citizens in order to strengthen and preserve American competitiveness in the global economy. Having worked together to support enactment of this legislation, the Partnership for Veterans Education is committed to ensuring that the program is a day-one success.

In order to achieve a successful launch of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, we believe it is of vital importance that implementation plans provide veterans with clear and easy to understand information regarding the scope of the benefit, and ensure that veterans are able to access the new benefit with ease.

We offer the following principles to guide the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in shaping the final design of the benefit:

- ***Veterans attending any public institution as an in-state, undergraduate student should be assured that the VA will cover the full cost of their tuition and fees.*** In light of the VA's clear and repeated assurances that it will fully cover these costs, we believe that the state tuition and fees chart has injected a level of complexity to the benefit calculation that is unnecessary for many veterans. Clarifying the principle stated above would go a long way toward helping veterans understand the scope of their benefit.
- ***The benefit should focus on typical, rather than atypical, attendance patterns, with the VA agreeing to pay the difference for any exceptional cases.*** We recommend that the state tuition and fees chart reflect benefit levels based on typical attendance at the highest price public institution in the state. This would provide clearer guidance to service members about the benefit they are likely to receive, and would also provide a reasonable benchmark on which to build the Yellow Ribbon Program. On a related note, we urge you to clarify whether it is your intention to have one number representing the "tuition and fees" cap per state (determined by adding tuition and fees together) or whether you intend to create two separate caps per state (i.e., a tuition cap for tuition charges, and a fees cap for fees charges). A decision to impose two separate caps could cause

confusion for veterans who seek to use their educational benefits at private institutions, out-of-state public institutions, or for graduate study.

- ***State tuition and fees benefit levels should not combine tuition at one institution's program with the fees of another institution's program.*** This methodology runs counter to the way most students enroll in a program of education and are actually charged for the cost of enrollment. Additionally, it generates wild discrepancies in the maximum benefit available from state to state.
- ***The VA should accord maximum flexibility to public and private institutions to encourage participation in the Yellow Ribbon Program.*** Non-profit private and public institutions who are considering participation in the Yellow Ribbon Program are eager to welcome veterans to their campuses, but unless clearer guidance is provided on the program requirements, veterans may lose the opportunity to use their benefit to attend these institutions. For example, many institutions have expressed confusion regarding the pending Yellow Ribbon Program survey, and whether participation in the survey will bind them to particular obligations before there is a full understanding of what these obligations may be.

In light of the issues raised above, we urge you to revise and clarify the state-by-state chart on your web site reflecting "Maximum Tuition and Fees Payable." We are concerned that there may be some inaccuracies in state-level data, as well as confusion regarding the calculation of the expected benefit from this chart, which could lead veterans to expect a benefit that is higher than what they may ultimately receive. The chart also fails to provide clear guidance to institutional officials who are contemplating participation in the Yellow Ribbon Program.

The Partnership for Veterans Education offers these comments in support of a seamless and successful implementation. We recognize that there will be other issues to resolve going forward, and the Partnership intends to continue working together to identify problems and offer recommendations so that our veterans will be able to access the benefits they have earned.

The Partnership for Veterans Education appreciates the challenges associated with developing implementation plans for a program of this size and complexity on an expedited basis. We stand ready to assist you in ensuring smooth transition for veterans in accessing this new benefit on August 1, 2009.

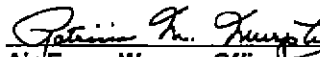
Sincerely,

The Partnership for Veterans Education
(Signatures enclosed)

Copy furnished: Senate and House Committees on Veterans Affairs



Air Force Association


Air Force Sergeants Association


Air Force Women Officers
Associated



American Logistics Association


Army Aviation Assn. of America


Assn. of Military Surgeons
of the United States


Assn. of the US Army


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CWO & WO Assn. US Coast Guard


Enlisted Association of the
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National Order of
Battlefield Commissions


Naval Enlisted Reserve Assn.


Naval Reserve Association


Non Commissioned Officers Assn.
of the United States of America


Reserve Enlisted Assn. of the US



Society of Medical Consultants
to the Armed Forces



The Military Chaplains Assn. of the USA



USCG Chief Petty Officers Assn.

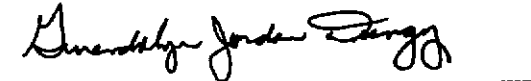

US Army Warrant Officers Assn.

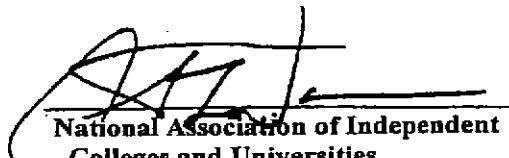

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the US


American Association of Collegiate
Registrars and Admissions Officers

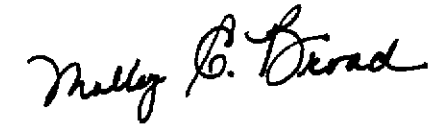

American Association of State Colleges
and Universities


American Association of Community
Colleges


National Association of Student Program
Administrators

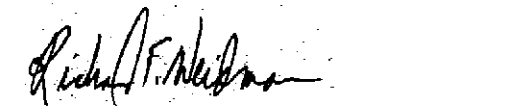

National Association of Independent
Colleges and Universities


Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges


American Council on Education


Paralyzed Veterans of America


Blinded Veterans Association


Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)