

Statement for the Record

Reserve Officers Association of the United States

And

Reserve Enlisted Association

for the

House Committee on Veteran Affairs

Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

Veteran Education

May 8, 2014



“Serving Citizen Warriors through Advocacy and Education since 1922.”™



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The Reserve Officers Association of the United States (ROA) is a professional association of commissioned, warrant and non-commissioned officers of our nation's seven uniformed services, and their spouses. ROA was founded in 1922 during the drawdown years following the end of World War I. It was formed as a permanent institution dedicated to National Defense, with a goal to teach America about the dangers of unpreparedness. When chartered by Congress in 1950, the act established the objective of ROA to: "... support and promote the development and execution of a military policy for the United States that will provide adequate National Security." The mission of ROA is to advocate strong Reserve Components and national security, and to support Reserve officers in their military and civilian lives.

The Association's 54,000 members include Reserve and Guard Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen, who frequently serve on Active Duty to meet critical needs of the uniformed services and their families. ROA's membership also includes officers from the U.S. Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, who often are first responders during national disasters and help prepare for homeland security. ROA is represented in each state with 49 departments including departments in Latin America, the District of Columbia, Europe, the Far East, and Puerto Rico. Each department has several chapters throughout the state. ROA has more than 250 chapters worldwide.

ROA is a member of The Military Coalition, where it co-chairs the Guard and Reserve Committee. ROA is also a co-director of the National Military/Veterans Alliance. Overall, ROA works with 75 military, veterans, and family support organizations.

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The Reserve Enlisted Association (REA) is an advocate for the enlisted men and women of the United States Military Reserve Components in support of National Security and Homeland Defense, with emphasis on the readiness, training, and quality -of- life issues affecting their welfare and that of their families and survivors. REA is the only Joint Reserve association representing enlisted reservists – all ranks from all five branches of the military.

Executive Director:

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DISCLOSURE OF FEDERAL GRANTS OR CONTRACTS:

The Reserve Officers Association and Reserve Enlisted Association are member-supported organizations. Neither ROA nor REA have received grants, sub-grants, contracts, or subcontracts from the federal government in the past three years. All other activities and services of the associations are accomplished free of any direct federal funding.



INTRODUCTION

On behalf of our members, the Reserve Officers Association (ROA) and the Reserve Enlisted Association (REA) thank the committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on Veteran Education. ROA and REA applaud the ongoing efforts by Congress to address issues facing veterans and service members, especially the recent gains in Veteran Education over the last few years through the instrument of the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

Just because one serves in the Reserve or Guard does not mean the individual is not a veteran. Reserve Force members are unique as they are the only veteran who when separated, continue to serve. Including the education program under Veteran Affairs jurisdiction continues to be a priority.

REQUESTED ACTION

ROA and REA urge Congress to continue its support of the Post 9/11 GI Bill enhancements and Tuition Assistance.

The Associations believe the following enhancements and improvements should be pursued in regards to the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits:

- **All GI Bill funding and administration belongs under the jurisdiction of the Senate and House committees on Veterans Affairs where veterans' education is a high priority.**
- **Adjust credit methods for those transferring from MGIB to the Post-9/11 GI Bill.**
- **Continue to improve oversight of colleges and associated loans given to student veterans.**
- **Accredit active duty experience and training toward completion of education programs.**
- **Improve educational support services for military, veterans and their families.**
- **Stipulate that Reserve Component personnel can use their educational benefits while mobilized.**
- **Transfer unused MGIB and Post-9/11 benefits for career service members to family members.**

DISCUSSION

The Post-9/11 GI Bill (also known as the GI Bill for the 21st Century) provides financial support for education and housing to veterans with at least 90 days of aggregate service on or after September 11, 2001. It is also a retention and recruiting tool that expands certain educational

benefits to service members, and their families. Despite many benefits provided, there are a few key legislative actions that are needed to better support the military member, veteran and family.

For those serving members who qualify for both the Montgomery GI bill (MGIB) and the Post 9/11 GI bill, the limit on total education is 36 months, yet the education dollar benefits are much lower under MGIB. The allowances paid to the MGIB for Selected Reserve is less than 12 percent of what is paid in the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Rather than losing months of education credit, serving members who used some MGIB should have education dollars adjusted instead.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill pays up to \$ 1600 per month, a \$1000 a year book stipend, plus a monthly living allowance up to \$2750 in urban centers. A Post 9/11 reimbursement calculator can be found at: <http://newgibill.org/calculator/>

Active Duty MGIB enrollment costs a member \$1200 that is paid over the first 12 months of active duty. An Active member can receive up to \$1,648 per month to go to school, while a Reserve or Guard member has no enrollment costs but is paid only \$362 per month as a full time student.

The incremental manner in which Chapters 30, 1606, and 1607 have evolved has led to inequities in educational benefits. Based on their service in overseas contingency operations, both at home and abroad, today’s military reservists deserve enhancements to their eligibility under the MGIB for Selected Reserves as well as what is offered in the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

Program	USC	Current Monthly Rates			Length of Service
		Full	³ / ₄ time	¹ / ₂ time	
MGIB-Active	Title 38 Chapter 30	\$1,648.00	\$1236.00	\$824.00	24-36 mos.
MGIB-SR REAP	Title 10 Chapter 1607	\$1318.40	\$988.80	\$659.20	2 years + consecutive
MGIB-SR REAP	Title 10 Chapter 1607	\$988.80	\$741.60	\$494.40	1 year + consecutive
MGIB-SR REAP	Title 10 Chapter 1607	\$659.20	\$494.40	\$329.60	90-364 days consecutive
MGIB –SR	Title 10 Chapter 1606	\$362.00	\$270.00	\$179.00	6 year commitment

One Reservist, who questioned the MGIB-SR (Chptr 1606) payout, explained that full time rates barely pay for gas and parking for a full time student.

Also, Reserve and National Guard service members usually have 14 years to use their MGIB-SR benefits starting the first day they become eligible. This eligibility ends when Guard or Reserve members stop drilling with pay. If a demobilized Reservist stops drilling, he or she may switch from chapter 1607 benefits back to chapter 1606 benefits for a period equaling the length of deployment plus four months. Active Duty recipients have 10 years after separation to use their benefits.

Accreditation standards promote excellence in educational preparation while assuring the students' employers and other schools that graduates of accredited programs are educated in a core set of knowledge and skills. Yet, quality education can be achieved in a variety of ways; ROA and REA supports accreditation options that recognize the military education, training and experience of the individual student.

BACKGROUND:

Enacted in 1984, The Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB), also known as the Veteran's GI Bill of Rights, provides military education benefits to Active and Reserve duty service members of the U.S. military. The incremental manner in which Chapters 30, 1606, and 1607 have evolved has led to inequities in educational benefits.

The Montgomery GI Bill, codified in Title 38, Chapter 30, was designed to stimulate All-Volunteer Force recruitment and retention and to help veterans readjust to the civilian world on completion of their service. Language authorization for a Selected Reserve version of MGIB is in Title 10, Chapter 1606.

MGIB-SR began to erode as a benefit at parity just as the active forces began to be deployed more often, and thousands of National Guard and Reserve were recalled or mobilized to provide supplemental operational support. These G-R tours did not qualify for active MGIB.

Many veterans and military service organizations worked together to push for an updated, more encompassing GI Bill to meet contemporary costs, changes in force structure, and the rapid deployments and return of service members from Iraq and Afghanistan. Congress signed into law the Post-9/11 GI Bill in July 2008. The new bill covers the full cost of undergraduate education at any public institution of higher learning (degree-granting institutions) in the country and many private schools, and provides transfer of eligibility for benefits.

In January 2014, the VA and DoD announced a new online student complaint system where service members, veterans, and their families can report negative experiences at education institutions and training programs administering the Post-9/11 GI Bill, DoD Military Tuition Assistance, and other military-related education benefit programs.

A better informed customer makes for a better student. In February 2014, the Department of Veterans Affairs launched today an online GI Bill® Comparison Tool to make it easier for Veterans, Service members and dependents to calculate their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits and learn more about VA's approved colleges, universities and other education and training programs across the country.

CONCLUSION

Education improves a veteran's chance for employment, and many returning combat veterans seek a change in the life paths. Those Reserve and National Guard members, who may not have had the chance to support a contingency operation, still need an opportunity and the incentive to further their education. The Montgomery GI Bill for Selected Reservists is the tool to accomplish such.

ROA and REA restate our profound gratitude for the bipartisan success achieved by this committee by improving parity on pay, compensation and benefits between the Active and Reserve Components. The challenges being faced with proposed budget cuts and sequestration are going to make this committee's job that much more challenging.

ROA and REA look forward to working with the committee where we can present solutions to these challenges and other issues, and offers our support in anyway.