

June 5, 2017

The Honorable Phil Roe
Chairman, Veterans Affairs Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tim Walz
Ranking Member, Veterans Affairs Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz:

In 2008, the 110th Congress passed the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act (GI Bill[®]), and millions of veterans across the country would seek post-secondary degrees in the years that followed. Since the passage of the most recent GI Bill, dozens of changes and improvements have been made, but more work needs to be done. On May 18th, a vast and diverse group of policy experts convened to discuss the future of this program, and more broadly the concept of the GI Bill itself.

Over 60 organizations were invited to participate in a roundtable discussion on “The Modernization of the GI Bill”, including a wide variety of representatives from higher education associations, military support organizations, and veterans service organizations. Select representatives from the Departments of Defense (DoD), Veterans Affairs (VA), and Education (ED), as well as the House of Representatives and Senate were also in attendance as observers of the discussions.

Follow-on meetings are under consideration regarding a long list of GI Bill improvements; however, we believe it is imperative that the proposals outlined below require the immediate attention of this congress. We thank the following members for their ardent support of student veterans in drafting and proposing legislation on these most pressing topics: Rep. Luke Messer (IN-6), Rep. Scott Peters (CA-52), Rep. Steven Palazzo (MS-4), and Rep. John Rutherford (FL-4).

- *H.R. 1216, Protecting Veterans From School Closures Act of 2017*¹ protects student veterans when their institutions of higher education fail by restoring their lost benefits. Currently veterans are the only student population that does not receive relief in a scenario like this. This bill would also be retroactive back to the closure of ITT Tech, but we would like to see it extended back to the closures of the Corinthian Colleges system as well. Every single day that passes is another setback to success in higher education for those who have already faced undue hardship due to the negligent business practices of some institutions of higher learning (IHL).²
- *H.R. 1379, “To amend title 38...”*³ for Purple Heart Recipient GI Bill eligibility would recognize the sacrifice of men and women who have served our country with dignity, sustaining battlefield injuries. Currently, only veterans who either served at least 36 months on active duty or are medically retired receive Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits at the 100 percent rate, excluding nearly 3,000 Purple Heart recipients over the next ten years who may not meet these administrative requirements. In practice, this error penalizes men and women who were wounded before they could reach the full term of their contract to receive GI Bill eligibility.⁴

¹ H.R. 1216, 115th Congress, Introduced February 24th, 2017; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1216>

² Senate companion bill is in draft under consideration with the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

³ H.R. 1379, 115th Congress, Introduced March 7th, 2017; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1379/>

⁴ Senate companion bill is S. 882, 115th Congress, Introduced April 6th, 2017; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/882>

- *H.R. 1384, Reserve Component Benefits Parity Act*⁵ recognizes the service of National Guard and Reserve Members by ensuring that an order to serve on active duty under sections 12304a and 12304b of title 10, United States Code, is treated the same as other orders to serve on active duty for determining the benefits eligibility of service members and veterans. Many of these service members perform the exact same duties as their active duty counterparts, yet they realize none of the benefits.⁶
- *H.R. 2103, Julian Woods Yellow Ribbon Expansion Act*⁷ extends the Yellow Ribbon Program benefits to recipients of the Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship. The Yellow Ribbon Program allows veterans to attend participating private institutes of higher education by having VA and the IHL split the remaining cost to attend. The Fry Scholarship provides GI Bill benefits to the children and surviving spouse of a service member who died in the line of duty, and we believe that should include access to the Yellow Ribbon Program.⁸

For student veterans of closed schools, Purple Heart recipients, members of the National Guard and Reserve, and survivors, we believe the proposed legislation is absolutely critical. We must get this done, and it must happen as soon as possible. We look forward to working with this congress to guarantee all current and future veterans receive the benefits that they have earned.

Sincerely,



Keith A. Reed
Headquarters Senior Director
Air Force Sergeants Association



Muriel A. Howard, Ph.D.
President
American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)



Joseph R. Chenelly
National Executive Director, AMVETS



VADM Lewis Crenshaw, USN (Ret.)
Chairman, Board of Directors
Association of the U.S. Navy



Kathy Roth-Douquet
CEO
Blue Star Families

⁵ H.R. 1384, 115th Congress, Introduced March 7th, 2017; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1384>

⁶ Senate companion bill is S. 844, 115th Congress, Introduced April 5th, 2017; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/844>

⁷ H.R. 2103, 115th Congress, Introduced April 17th, 2017; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2103>

⁸ Senate companion bill is S. 798, 115th Congress, Introduced March 30th, 2017; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/798>



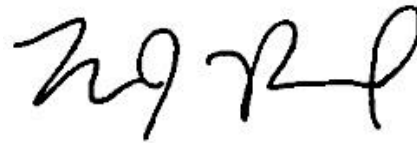
Carol Setteducato
Executive Director
Chief Warrant & Warrant Officers
Association, USCG



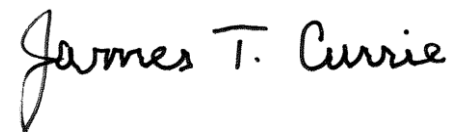
John R. Davis
Director of Legislative Programs
Fleet Reserve Association



Randy Reid, USCG (Ret.)
Executive Director
Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association
& Enlisted Association



Bill Rausch
Executive Director
Got Your 6



Col. James T. Currie, Ph.D., USA (Ret.)
Executive Director
Commissioned Officers Association of the
U.S. Public Health Service



Kristofer Goldsmith
Founder and Chairman
High Ground Veterans Advocacy



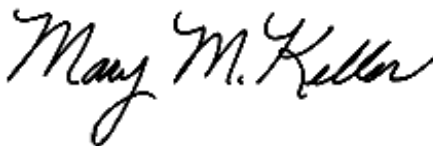
Dan Caldwell
Executive Director
Concerned Veterans for America



COL Carl A. Singer, USA (Ret.)
National Commander
Jewish War Veterans of the USA



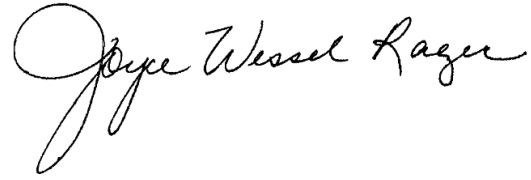
Sgt Maj Frank Yoakum, USA (Ret.)
Executive Director
Enlisted Association of the National Guard
of the United States



Mary M. Keller, Ed.D.
President and Chief Executive Officer
Military Child Education Coalition



Hershel Gober
National Commander
Military Order of the Purple Heart



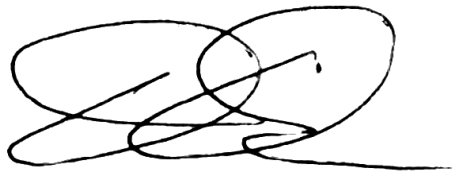
Joyce Wessel Raezer
Executive Director
National Military Family Association



Spencer Kympton
President
The Mission Continues



Bruce B. Englehardt
President/CEO
Navy Mutual Aid Association



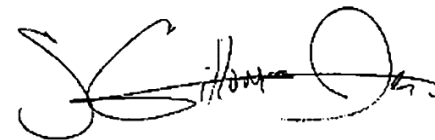
Dan Wellman
President
National Association of State Approving
Agencies




Jon Ostrowski, Senior Chief, USCGR (Ret.)
Executive Director
Non Commissioned Officers Association



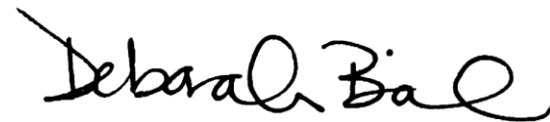
Keith Glindemann
President
National Association of Veterans' Program
Administrators



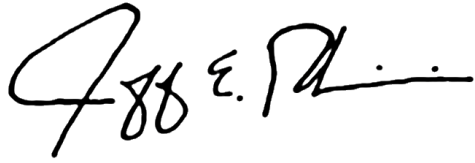
Sherman Gillums, Jr.
Executive Director
Paralyzed Veterans of America



Jessie R. Robinson
Brigadier General, ARNG (Ret.)
President, National Guard Association of the
United States (NGAUS)



Deborah Bial
President and Founder
The Posse Foundation



Jeffrey E. Phillips, Major General, USA (Ret.)
Executive Director
Reserve Officers Association



Ryan Manion
President
Travis Manion Foundation



Michael Saunders
Deputy Legislative Director
The Retired Enlisted Association



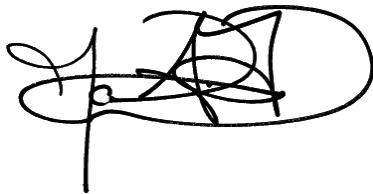
Carrie Wofford
President
Veterans Education Success



Michael Blecker
Executive Director
Swords to Plowshares



Anthony Hardie
National Board Chair & Director
Veterans for Common Sense



Jared Lyon
President & CEO
Student Veterans of America



Robert E. Wallace
Executive Director
Veterans of Foreign Wars



Bonnie Carroll
President & Founder
Tragedy Assistance Program For Survivors



John Rowan
President and CEO
Vietnam Veterans of America



Sidney Ellington
Executive Director
Warrior-Scholar Project



Lt. Gen. Michael S. Lennington (Ret.)
Chief Executive Officer
Wounded Warrior Project

cc: Chairman Johnny Isakson, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
Senator Jon Tester, Ranking Member, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
Chairman Mac Thornberry, House Armed Services Committee
Representative Adam Smith, Ranking Member, House Armed Services Committee
Chairman John McCain, Senate Armed Services Committee
Representative Jack Reed, Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee
Leader Kevin McCarthy, House Majority
Leader Nancy Pelosi, House Minority
Leader Mitch McConnell, Senate Majority
Leader Chuck Schumer, Senate Minority
Chairman Diane Black, House Budget Committee
Representative John Yarmuth, Ranking Member, House Budget Committee
Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen, House Appropriations Committee
Representative Nita Lowey, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee
Chairman Mike Enzi, Senate Budget Committee
Senator Bernie Sanders, Ranking Member, Senate Budget Committee
Chairman Thad Cochran, Senate Appropriations Committee
Senator Patrick Leahy, Vice-Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
Secretary David Shulkin, M.D., Department of Veterans Affairs
Secretary Jim Mattis, Department of Defense
Jennifer Korn, White House Office of Public Liaison