

STATEMENT OF

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Before the

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BENEFITS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

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Once again, Mr. Chairman, I wish to express the thanks of the 2.8 million members of The American Legion for your continued interest in the recognition of military training by civilian licensing and credentialing authorities. Proper recognition of military vocational training will be a direct benefit to 80-90 thousand separating service members annually. These veterans, with the opportunity for a seamless transition to civilian life, will continue to be taxpayers, with no significant break in employment. These veterans will benefit, their families will benefit, and society will benefit from the more expeditious use of their considerable skills and talents.

Mr. Chairman, at the last hearing, The American Legion posed a series of questions to which this Subcommittee should seek answers. The questions focus on the specifics of this issue. It is The American Legion's sincere hope that answers to all these questions can be obtained from the relevant agencies.

1. Which Federal agency should be in charge of coordinating the governmental efforts in this important area? Where will the database on MOS vs. college credits reside?
2. Where will be the repository of information for agencies, organizations, and individuals on credentialing?
3. How will Federal and State agencies work with credentialing organizations and agencies and with employers to eliminate this barrier to the employment of separating service members?
4. What role will an expanded GI educational benefits program have in helping service members fill in the gaps in skill requirements?

5. What effect will a deliberate credentialing effort on the part of armed forces training schools have on recruiting – on retention? In our opinion, well-constructed studies are needed. Who will do them?
6. Is the current Federal Task Force effective in addressing this problem? If not, how can it be made more effective?
7. What is the role of the educational institutions in credentialing?
8. What is the role of apprenticeship programs in credentialing?
9. What incentives can be made available to the business community to train veterans by filling in skills gaps?
10. How can Federal agencies that issue credentials, such as the Federal Communications Commission or the Federal Aviation Administration, come to recognize military training?
11. What is the role of the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists and Local Veterans Employment Representatives, now working in the public labor exchange in the credentialing effort?
12. Is this problem more a function of military training or the ability of credentialing bodies to understand and correctly evaluate military training as it relates to the credential sought?
13. Would a national conference, attended by interested parties from the military, VA, Congressional, state and private sectors, be a useful step in improving the dialogue?

Mr. Chairman, at this point it seems appropriate to comment on some of the questions and any progress or lack thereof on the subject contained in the question.

Questions 1-3 relate to which Federal agency will become the “lead center” in the effort to obtain recognition for military training. Both the Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) at the Department of Labor and the Education Service at the Department of Veterans Affairs have taken separate leadership roles in this endeavor. VETS has convened a Federal task force to examine the issue from a Federal perspective. The task force continues to meet with two interim reports having been issued. The Education Service has stepped forward with positive suggestions on how to craft legislation to allow GI educational benefits to pay for the examinations necessary for a separating service member to obtain a required credential. These are positive steps. However, without some legislative mandate, no repository for a database has been designated, though VETS has done some work in this area.

Question 4 will have been answered when the current legislative initiative authorizing payment of costs for credentialing examinations passes and is signed by the

President. The American Legion would like to congratulate your leadership, Mr. Chairman, and that of the majority and minority staff for the work done on this important step.

Question 5 relates to steps the armed services must take to gauge the effect of the recognition of credentialing on recruitment and retention. To our knowledge, only the Navy has done anything in this area. The Navy study showed that educational and credentialing opportunities, when offered to qualified service members, resulted in a higher reenlistment rate. More needs to be done in this area. The American Legion believes that offering credentialing opportunities by recruiters and by reenlistment counselors will result in fewer shortages in critical skills now faced by the armed forces.

Question 6 addresses the effectiveness of the Federal task force. On June 14, the task force issued a status report, which chronicled the progress by several agencies in hiring veterans into jobs needing credentials. Of particular note are efforts by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Military Sealift Command (MSC). Both agencies have taken several positive steps to recognize military training conducted by the armed forces as meeting some of the major requirements for careers. The FAA also offered some suggestions to the services on how to improve that training so as to better prepare separating service members for the required examinations. MSC was able to place former service members in dozens of jobs paying \$30,000 or more by sending a direct letter to separating naval personnel. These steps are to be commended. The American Legion is unaware of any planned future meetings scheduled for the task force.

With respect to questions 7 and 8, the licensing and credentialing conference held on June 21-22, 2000, addressed only the educational role. A speaker from the American Council on Education pointed out their role in examining course work offered by military schools and translating it into college credits. There is much more information to be discovered here. The role of the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training and the role of labor unions in certifying military experience was barely touched at the conference. More work is needed here also.

Question 9 assumes that the business community needs some begging, cajoling, or some kind of incentive to hire former service members. This may be a false assumption. As the economy continues to expand, companies are finding it harder and harder to find qualified workers. Many of them have discovered the armed services as an excellent source of skilled people. Industry is becoming aware of all of the attributes that veterans bring to the American work force. A number of articles in trade and national newsmagazines have focused on this trend. Consequently, more and more separating service members are finding good civilian careers faster than before.

Question 10 has been answered in the comments associated with Question 6.

Question 11 relates to the role of Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOP) and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER) in the credentialing. The American Legion views their role as extremely important. Many of

these employment professionals are doing Transitional Assistance Program (TAP) training on military bases for service members leaving the armed services. Their knowledge of the credentialing process is critical to a seamless transition for military people. As more and more coherence comes to pass with this subject, access to web sites by DVOPs and LVERs will be a necessity in answering questions on specific credentialing requirements. DVOPs and LVERs will become a critical link in the ability of these 80-90,000 veterans to transition into the American work force.

Questions 12 and 13 relate to an apparent lack of communications between civilian authorities and the military training establishment. The national conference held on June 21-22 of this year began to address this problem. The conference pointed out that solutions are indeed possible. More communication between the military schools and the civilian credentialing authorities must improve. This can be accomplished with future conferences, which focus more on the mechanics of the process in each case. The American Legion encourages all parties involved to work for better and more communications. Nobody loses in this case. Credentialing authorities gain members. Industry gains qualified and certified employees, while veterans gain civilian careers.

The last subject to be addressed by The American Legion is the broad subject of national conferences. Mr. Chairman, The American Legion felt the conference, held in June, was very successful. The only problem with the conference was the funding mechanism. In order for it to be held, funding was necessary. For one reason or another, the Federal government declined to fund the conference. It fell to the Coalition for Professional Certification to come up with the money. Their budget took a huge and unnecessary hit. This is wrong. The Federal government should fund that conference and all future conferences. Service members are employees of the Federal government. Their time away from home and family serves all of American society by protecting the rights and freedoms enjoyed by all of us. The American Legion believes it is the proper role of the Federal government to ease the transition of veterans reentering civilian society. To the extent that these conferences help that effort, the Federal government should provide the funding.

Mr. Chairman, you have performed an invaluable service by holding these hearings and focusing your personal interest in its importance. Now the challenge will be to continue to address this problem until it is solved. Next January, a new administration will assume office and a new Congress will convene. The American Legion will continue to persuade this important veterans' employment issue. With your help, it can and will be done.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for this opportunity.