Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit The American Legion’s views on the legislation being considered by the Subcommittee today. We appreciate the efforts of this Subcommittee to address the different needs of the men and women who are currently serving and those who served during past conflicts.

**H.R. 120: Disabled Veterans' Surviving Spouses Home Loans Act**

*Includes as a veteran, for purposes of eligibility for housing loans guaranteed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the surviving spouse of a veteran who at the time of death was in receipt of or entitled to compensation for a service-connected disability rated totally disabling if: (1) the disability was so rated for 10 or more years preceding death; (2) the disability was so rated for at least 5 years since the veteran's discharge or release from active duty; or (3) the veteran was a former prisoner of war who died after September 30, 1999, and the disability was so rated for at least 1 year preceding death. Requires any applicable VA housing loan fee to be collected from such spouse.*

Generally, VA pays Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) to the surviving spouses of military service members who die while on active duty, and to surviving spouses of veterans whose death resulted from service-related causes. These surviving spouses are also eligible for VA Home Loan Guaranty Benefits.

DIC also may be paid to surviving spouses of veterans who were totally disabled from service-connected conditions at the time of death, even though their service-connected disabilities did not cause their deaths. Such surviving spouses qualify according to the same criteria used in H.R. 120. Although, these qualifying surviving spouses are eligible for the same DIC benefit as those above, they are not eligible for similar VA Home Loan Guaranty Benefits. H.R. 120 would correct this inequity.

The American Legion supports this bill.
H.R.240

To amend title 38, United States Code, to promote jobs for veterans through the use of sole source contracts by Department of Veterans Affairs for purposes of meeting the contracting goals and preferences of the Department of Veterans Affairs for small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans.

This legislation is simple; it changes one word in title 38 § 8127(c). It changes the word "may" to "shall" and is intended to reemphasize the priority of place of veteran-owned small businesses in the awarding of certain contracts by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

It is vital that veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses receive a fair and proportionate share of federal contracts, especially from the agency whose primary function is to help veterans – the VA, so these veterans can build and maintain successful businesses.

To that end, The American Legion supports legislation that supports and develops veteran and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses, while providing them equal opportunity to start and/or grow a small business, including establishing numerical goals for all veterans to compete in government procurement. We believe this legislation serves that end.

The American Legion supports this bill.

H.R.1263

Amends the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to afford surviving spouses of servicemembers who die while in the military and whose death is service-connected the same protections against sale, foreclosure, and seizure of property currently applicable to their husbands who while in military service are unable to meet an obligation on real or personal property.

Military families serve our country with pride, honor, and quiet dedication. We know that every member of a military family sacrifices just as much for this country. When one member of the family goes to war, the whole family goes with them. Currently, spouses of servicemembers who have died while in service have no mortgage protections, leaving grieving families vulnerable to losing their home and being put on the streets. Extending mortgage foreclosure protection to surviving spouses will allow families to explore their options so they may keep their home.

The American Legion supports this bill.

H.R.1911: Protecting Veterans' Homes Act

Amends the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to extend from 9 to 12 months after military service the period of protection against mortgage sale or foreclosure, as well as the stay of proceedings, in the case of an obligation on real property of a service member that originated before the period of military service. Amends the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 to repeal the sunset date for such periods of relief.
This bill would help active duty service members who are returning home and are facing foreclosure stay in their homes. Given the tough housing and job markets, extending the period of protection as this bill does will give servicemembers the time they need after returning from deployment to regain solid financial footing.

**The American Legion supports this bill.**

**H.R.2274**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense to submit to Congress annual reports on the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program, and for other purposes.*

With regard to that part of H.R. 2274 within the jurisdiction of this committee, The American Legion generally supports the spirit of this legislation, but we recommend the following improvements. First and foremost, the report should be made available to the public by placing a link to the report on the GI Bill landing page of the VA website. In addition, the report should include such information as may be useful to a student-veteran, such as student-veteran attendance by type of college, graduation and dropout rates, average tuition rates, and average debt accrued by type. Such information would assist student-veterans make informed decisions about the use of this earned benefit.

**H.R.2301: Streamlining Education Claims Processing Act of 2011**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make payments to educational institutions under the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program at the end of a quarter, semester, or term, and for other purposes.*

The American Legion’s first and foremost concern with the administration of the new GI Bill is that veterans depending on this education benefit are able to apply for and receive Chapter 33 benefits in as timely and seamless a manner as possible. Because H.R. 2301 is aimed at adjusting the payment relationship between VA and educational institutions, it is for the most part beyond our purview except to note that we view favorably the tendency the change would have to mitigate the number of overpayments incurred by student-veterans. To establish an overpayment puts unnecessary burdens on both the student and VA in the effort to recover the overpayment. Therefore, eliminating as much as possible such overpayments is good for both students and VA.

**The American Legion supports this bill.**

**H.R.2302**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to notify Congress of conferences sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs.*

The American Legion has no position on this bill at this time.
**H.R.2329**

*To amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to provide for certain requirements for financial institutions that are creditors for obligations and liabilities covered by that Act.*

This bill seeks to encourage compliance with the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) by mandating that large lending institutions subject to the SCRA designate an employee as a compliance officer who is responsible for ensuring the institution's compliance with provisions in the SCRA relating to the maximum rate of interest on debts incurred before military service, and for distributing information to servicemembers whose obligations and liabilities are covered by those provisions. In addition, it requires these lending institutions to maintain a toll-free telephone number and make such telephone number available on the primary Internet Web site of the institution.

Earlier this year, when reports that one of America's largest banks had been overcharging about 4,000 servicemembers on their home loans, and had improperly foreclosed on the homes of 14 military families, we wholeheartedly joined the chorus of justifiable outrage about this shocking situation and called upon all financial institutions that handle mortgages for military families to review policies and practices, to make sure they are obeying federal law.

While the bank involved has issued a mea culpa and made efforts to reassure the men and women of our military their commitment to make this right, the episode makes it clear that further strengthening of the SCRA is called for. It is a national security imperative that servicemembers be able to fight the nation’s wars without having to worry about their rights being trampled at home. The tragic stories of those who have been adversely affected by the failure of our financial institutions to play by the rules further highlight the necessity of enhancing the effectiveness of the legal and regulatory protections for our servicemembers and veterans.

*The American Legion supports this bill.*

**H.R. 2345**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the authorization of appropriations for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to pay a monthly assistance allowance to disabled veterans training or competing for the Paralympic Team and the authorization of appropriations for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide assistance to United States Paralympics, Inc.*

Public Law 110-389 (2008) authorized VA to award grants to the U.S. Olympic Committee to plan, manage and implement an adaptive sports program for disabled veterans and disabled members of the Armed Forces. In addition, it authorized a monthly subsistence allowance to qualifying disabled veterans in training or competing for the Paralympics to help them more easily take part in competitive sports. Further, both were authorized during fiscal years 2010 through 2013. H.R. 2345 would extend these authorizations through 2018.
Since its foundation in 1919, The American Legion has identified as its most important issue the rehabilitation and reintegration of the disabled veteran. We are also strong believers in the physical and psychological benefits that come from involvement in sports and recreation. Thus, we support such programs of the U. S. Olympic Committee that facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration of our disabled veterans and servicemembers. We know that sports and physical activity can have a transformative effect on those with a physical disability and the continued provision of funds will help to expand and provide greater access to sports programs for injured veterans and disabled members of the Armed Forces.

**The American Legion supports this bill.**

The American Legion appreciates the opportunity to comment on the bills being considered by the Subcommittee. I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have. Thank you.