STATEMENT OF
MARK SEAVEY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
H.R. 1037, H.R. 1098, H.R. 1168, H.R. 1172, H.R. 1821, H.R. 1879, H.R. 2180

MAY 21, 2009

Madame Chairwoman, Ranking Member Boozman, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present The American Legion's views on the several pieces of legislation being considered by the Subcommittee today. The American Legion commends the Subcommittee for holding a hearing to discuss these very important and timely issues.

H.R. 1037, Pilot College Work Study Programs for Veterans Act of 2009, seeks to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a five-year pilot project to test the feasibility and advisability of expanding the scope of certain qualifying work-study activities under title 38, United States Code. The American Legion supports this pilot program. According to DOL the present unemployment rate for recently discharged veterans is an alarming 20 percent, and one out of every four veterans who do find employment earn less than $25,000 per year. Unfortunately, many of the thousands of servicemembers who are currently leaving the service are from the combat arms and non-skilled professions that are not readily transferable to the civilian labor market. The American Legion believes this work study program would provide needed job skills and experience for veterans so they transition seamlessly and obtain a quality-of-life after honorably serving the United States.

H.R. 1098, seeks to amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the amount of educational assistance payable by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to certain individuals pursuing internships or on-the-job training. The American Legion supports this legislation. The American Legion believes the increase in pay within the Montgomery GI Bill, Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance, Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance, and Selected Reserve Montgomery GI Bill, will greatly benefit veterans who are pursuing internships or on-the-job training with necessary income that will provide for their daily and living expenses.

H.R. 1168, would amend Chapter 42 of title 38, United States Code, to provide certain veterans with employment training assistance. The American Legion supports this legislation. This bill will provide veterans, especially recently separated veterans who are mission-oriented, trainable, drug-free, and have great work ethic, with training that will prepare them to obtain gainful employment so they can financially provide for themselves and their families.

H.R. 1172, seeks to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to include on the internet website of the Department of Veterans Affairs a list of organizations that provide scholarships to veterans and their survivors. The American Legion supports this action. This additional scholarship information on VA's website would provide veterans and their survivors with resources that will assist them in their educational endeavors and ultimately help them to smoothly transition from active duty to the civilian workforce.

H.R. 1821, amends Chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, to increase vocational rehabilitation and employment assistance, and for other purposes. The American Legion supports the increase in pay for eligible veterans. This legislation will provide veterans with increased allowances more closely aligned to financial benefits under the Post 9/11 GI Bill. The American Legion believes this legislation will greatly assist and encourage eligible veterans to remain in vocational rehabilitation programs, search for employment, and assist with living expenses. Additionally, this bill will provide reimbursements for child care to veterans who are participating in a vocational rehabilitation program and/or the sole caretaker of a child (or children).

H.R. 1879, seeks to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for employment and reemployment rights for certain individuals ordered to full-time National Guard duty. Today, Reserve forces are operational forces and they fight side-by-side active duty forces bringing their unique skills and abilities to the modern battlefield. The American Legion believes the reemployment benefits due these National Guard warriors should be changed to reflect the new military reality. The American Legion supports this provision and the idea that all veterans be treated equally regardless of their National Guard status in that an individual who is called to duty and serves honorably should receive these kinds of benefits.

H.R. 2180, amends title 38, United States Code, to waive housing loan fees for certain veterans with service-connected disabilities called to active service. The American Legion supports this initiative to waive housing loans fees for these service-disabled veterans, so they and their families can move into quality housing and use these monies for other necessary items and/or projects.

The American Legion appreciates the opportunity to present this statement for the record. Again, thank you Madame Chairwoman, Ranking Member Boozman, and Members of the Subcommittee for allowing The American Legion to present its views on these very important issues.