STATEMENT OF
ROBERT W. MADDEN, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
NATIONAL ECONOMIC COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
H.R. 3257, H.R. 3484, H.R. 3579, H.R. 3813, H.R. 3948, H.R. 3976, H.R. 4079, H.R. 4203, H.R. 4359, and H.R. 4469

FEBRUARY 25, 2010

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 measures under the jurisdiction of this Subcommittee. The American Legion commends the Subcommittee for holding a hearing to discuss these very important and timely issues.

H.R. 3257, Military Family Leave Act of 2009, would entitle an employed family member of a member of the Armed Forces to two workweeks of leave per year for each family member who:

- receives notification of a call or order to active duty in support of a contingency operation, or
- who is deployed in connection with a contingency operation.

This measure would allow such leave to:

- be taken intermittently or on a reduced leave schedule; and
- consist of paid or unpaid leave, as the employer considers appropriate.

Additionally, the bill would allow an employer to require certification of entitlement to such leave within a leave request.

Finally, the measure would provide employment and benefits protection for employees upon their return from such leave and would prohibit an employer from interfering with or otherwise denying the exercise of such leave rights.

The American Legion supports this pilot program. As a national veterans' service organization of wartime veterans, Legionnaires understand the hardships and sacrifices made by service members and their families, especially lengthy separations. The American Legion recognizes military service as the ultimate form of community service in that each service member is committed to national goals and objectives more significant than individual desires.

Military deployments frequently require service members to miss life cycle events, such as births, deaths, marriages, anniversaries that most Americans celebrate routinely in a family-centered environment. Such military deployments are extremely taxing on the children of service members, especially single parents who have to make special child care arrangements.

The American Legion would encourage that there should be some deference given to the measures that must be taken in an effort to mitigate the temporary loss of the physical contributions to the household of the deployed service member. The American Legion urges Congress to support H.R. 3257 and amend title 38, United States Code (USC), to grant family members of the uniformed services temporary annual leave during the deployment of such members. If passed, we believe this law will improve the morale of our troops and improve the military quality of life, for which The American Legion has so vehemently supported over the years.

H.R. 3484 would extend to June 30, 2014, the period during which the following work-study activities qualify for an additional veterans' educational assistance allowance:

- outreach services furnished by employees of a state approving agency;
- provision of hospital and domiciliary care in a state home; and
- activity relating to the administration of a national cemetery or state veterans' cemetery.

At this time, The American Legion does not have an official position regarding H.R. 3484.

H.R. 3579 would amend the Montgomery GI Bill Educational Assistance Program for veterans to increase the reporting fee payable to educational institutions that enroll veterans receiving assistance.

The American Legion supports this legislation. Due to the lack of staffing and budget cuts that are being made at institutions, an increase in reporting fees is warranted. The school's certifying official assists veterans with applying for classes and monitors their enrollment weekly along with ensuring this information is reported to VA. The increased funding could assist with more staffing and provide better equipment (i.e. computers) which would provide a self-serve area for veterans or allow more funds to provide for Veterans' Centers.

H.R. 3813, Veterans Training Act, would deem a program of education as an approved program for purposes of the Post-9/11 Veterans' Educational Assistance Program if the program is offered by an institution offering:

- postsecondary instruction that leads to an associate or higher degree and the institution is an approved institution of higher learning; or
- instruction that does not lead to an associate or higher degree and the institution is an approved educational institution.

The American Legion has sought to amend Chapter 33, title 38, USC, to include apprenticeship programs, flight training, correspondence schools, vocational schools and on-the-job training programs being completed at any educational institute. The American Legion has recommended that Chapter 33 needed to be modified to include non-college degree programs. Veterans choosing to use their educational benefits at other than Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) that are currently covered by Chapter 30 should be allowed to attend their choice of education and receive the same benefits that Chapter 33 recipients are entitled.

Currently, veterans who are using their Chapter 30 benefits are denied the housing and books stipend. These programs were not included in the original language for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. H.R. 3813 seeks to ensure that all veterans who choose to use their education benefits are treated fairly, no matter what course of education they are undergoing. The American Legion strongly supports H.R. 3813 and believes this bill will grant all eligible veterans the right to choose their own education path.

H.R. 3948, Test Prep for Heroes Act, would amend Chapter 31 of title 38, USC, to provide for entitlement under the Post 9/11 Educational Assistance Program to pay for test preparatory courses. 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. 3976, Helping Heroes Keep Their Homes Act of 2009, would amend the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 to extend through December 31, 2015, specified protections for service members relating to mortgages and mortgage foreclosures.

The American Legion supports efforts to enhance benefits received by service members to retain their home during any housing crisis. Service members serve multiple deployments to combat zones and should be afforded relief in order to stay in their current homes where they and their families reside. In order to maintain quality of life while deployed, it is imperative for service members and their families to be afforded all opportunities to continue their way of life and in their current residence. Service members and their families have sacrificed enough and should not be forced to undergo the additional stress of possible foreclosure to their home.

H.R. 4079 would amend title 38, USC, to temporarily remove the requirement for employers to increase wages for veterans enrolled in on-the-job training programs. The American Legion believes that the quality of life for all veterans of this great nation plays an important role in this diverse economy. The American Legion believes veterans, who are undergoing on-the-job training, should not be limited to a certain pay scale and should not be denied increases in pay. Many of these veterans are already struggling with their financial security because of their on-the-job program, but to deny them an increase should not simply happen. There are

circumstances when veterans are involved in an on-the-job training program and need to provide for their family and need their wages to be increased. In addition, The American Legion believes on-the-job training programs should fall under Chapter 33 as a vocational education benefits. This would enable those veterans, who are undergoing on-the-job training programs, the housing allowance and books stipend desperately needed. This benefit would create additional support for those veterans and their families and also give them the same benefits as those individuals who are undergoing a traditional school path.

H.R. 4203 would seek to amend title 38, USC, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide veterans certain educational assistance payments through direct deposit. The American Legion does not have an official position on H.R. 4203.

H.R. 4359, Warriors Adapting Residences with Mortgages for Energy Renovations Act, amends title 38, USC, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to guarantee housing loans for the construction of energy sufficient dwellings. At this time, The American Legion has no official position on H.R. 4359.

H.R. 4469 would amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to provide for protection of child custody arrangements for parents who are members of the Armed Forces deployed in support of a contingency operation. At this time, The American Legion has no official position on H.R. 4469.

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.