STATEMENT OF
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THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
H.R. 1383, H.R. 802, H.R. 1657, AND DRAFT LEGISLATION

MAY 3, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Braley, 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. 1383, Restoring GI Fairness Act of 2011, To temporarily preserve higher rates for tuition and fees for programs of education at non-public institutions of higher learning pursued by individuals enrolled in the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs before the enactment of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010, and for other purposes. With the many changes recently made to the Post-9/11 GI Bill unintended consequences need to be remedied through the legislative process. While this bill helps address one of those issues relating to the benefits offered veterans attending private schools, it falls short in addressing those other issues. Therefore, The America Legion stands firmly committed to ensure every group somewhat affected by the most recent changes should be included in all encompassing legislative change.

The American Legion requests Congress add the following provision and issues to address all the needs of returning veterans and their access to education benefits entitled to them:

- grandfathering in the private schools (as addressed in this legislation) but also admitting those who attend out-of-state public universities who fall under the same $17,500.00 cap;
- addition of interval pay to include those months when veterans are between semesters yet in need of the housing allowance to meet their financial responsibilities, and;
- addressing the role of state approving agencies in verifying veteran-friendly programs that are specific for the demographic.

The American Legion's views are established in a consensus that all veterans are entitled to certain education benefits that will enable them to continue moving forward, in terms of their success, and we should continue to increase their accessibility and not eliminate any portion that might affect their sustainability in attaining a higher education.

H.R. 802, seeks to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a VetStar Award Program. *The American Legion supports this legislation*. The American Legion believes in rewarding those small, medium and large businesses that contribute to the welfare of veteran employment. Veterans hire veterans. When possible, it is imperative that businesses that hire and retain veterans should be recognized for their continued contribution to the country. The American Legion currently provides recognition for businesses that hire veterans and would wholeheartedly agree, through the success of our own program, this type of behavior should be rewarded. Programs such as the VetStar Award shed light into the immense work done by American businesses and contribute to other companies realizing their own veteran hiring potential.

H.R. 1657, To amend title 38, United States Code, to revise the enforcement penalties for misrepresentation of a business concern as a small business concern owned and controlled by veterans or as a small business concern owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans. The ability of a Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) to gain government contracts is a right, not a privilege. *The American Legion supports H.R. 1657.* The minimal oversight and protection for SDVOSB needs to come to an end. Time after time, federal agencies are allowing fraudulent individuals to gain contracts intended for a SDVOSB or after the award of a contract discovering the "SDVOSB company" was not run or owned by a service disabled veteran. In a report submitted in 2009, the Government Accountability Office estimated over $100 million was awarded to ineligible firms who stated they were SDVOSB. This information and number is only from a 10-case study. In addition, the GAO report cited that "agencies show that significant control weaknesses in the SDVOSB program allow ineligible firms to receive millions in SDVOSB contracts. The lack of effective fraud-prevention controls by SBA and agencies awarding contracts allowed these ineligible firms to receive approximately $100 million of sole-source or set-aside SDVOSB contracts over the last several years."

This lack of prevention only goes to undermine the significant impact that SDVOSB can have in the government contracting realm. We must prevent this abuse and fraud, maintaining the ease of accessibility for self-certification, and ensure growth and success for the legitimate SDVOSB.

Draft legislation, The *American Legion supports this legislation*. Adaptive housing assistance is vitally important in light of the continuing numbers of disabled service members returning from combat zones as the United States engages in action on multiple fronts overseas. This aid cannot be allowed to sunset, and therefore the extension to this aid is a needed and supported by The Legion.

The American Legion appreciates the opportunity to present this statement. Again, thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Braley, and Members of the Subcommittee for allowing The American Legion to present its views on these very important issues today.