



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

March 16, 2009

Mr. James Bombard
Chairman
Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education
Division of Veterans' Affairs
5 Empire State Plaza, Suite 2836
Albany, NY 12223-1551

Dear Mr. Bombard:

Thank you for your letter advising me of the recommendations from the Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education's November 12-13, 2008, meeting. Enclosed are the Department's responses to the recommendations.

As you noted, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is in the process of implementing major changes to Veterans' education benefits with the Post-9/11 GI Bill. We expect to implement the new program by August 1, 2009.

VA recently established a new Program Executive Office to manage the development of the overall process for administering the Post-9/11 GI Bill. We have also contracted with the MITRE Corporation, a Federally funded research and development center, to assist us with implementation and program management. MITRE Corporation is also supporting us in our communication strategy with our stakeholders and the Veterans and servicemembers we serve.

I am committed to transforming the VA into an organization that reflects the change and commitment our Nation expects and our Veterans deserve. I appreciate the Committee's interest and support for successful implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric K. Shinseki".

Eric K. Shinseki

Enclosures

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Responses to Veteran's Advisory Committee on Education Recommendations for November 2008

Recommendation 1: VA expand its outreach efforts that advertise the Post-9/11 GI Bill by using more grassroots organizations like the American Library Association.

Response: We have enclosed a listing of past and future stakeholder communications and outreach efforts. The list is not all-inclusive, but provides a representation of the types of outreach activities. VA has reached out to several organizations for assistance in disseminating information about the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

We revised our quarterly notification to active duty members to include information about the new benefit. The quarterly mailing is distributed to individuals at three separate times in their military career. The first mailing is upon completion of 12 months of active duty, the second occurs at 24 months, and the third occurs when the member separates from active duty. In addition, we are working with a contractor to mail an informational letter to each individual who served at least 30 days of continuous active duty service after September 10, 2001. The mailing includes reservists and guard members who were mobilized for 30 days or more after September 10, 2001. The letter provides more detailed information about the new benefit.

As part of our support from the MITRE Corporation, we requested an evaluation of our communication efforts. MITRE began conducting stakeholder interviews in December.

In addition, on November 17, 2008, VA released an article about the new benefit through North American Precis Syndicate, Inc. That news release generated 232 articles in 15 different states with a readership of 5,312,080. The article was displayed on news organizations' websites and was viewed by an average of 6,335,800 visitors each month.

Recommendation 2: VA include within its Strategic Plan increased media outreach to include taking advantage of internet search capabilities (i.e. Google), social networking sites like FaceBook, and other commercial web-casting resource vehicles, TV, radio, etc. to reach veterans and service members eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. As such, VACOE would like VA to earmark a portion of the \$120 million set aside for Post-9/11 GI Bill general operating expenses to accomplish this task and consider hiring a contractor to conduct outreach.

Response: We agree with using increased social media outreach for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. VA is developing policy and procedures for utilizing social media and other internet tools for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, as well as for other benefits we administer. We recently posted an article about the Post-9/11 GI Bill on the "Second Life" website (a 3D virtual world). In addition, we continue to utilize the services of MITRE Corporation to assist with marketing strategies. We are in the process of contracting with a national media distribution company for radio spots and additional print.

Recommendation 3: VA use maximum leverage in the interpretation of Public Law 110-252 in order to broaden the level of eligibility to veterans and other service-members. VACOE recommends VA to take steps to avoid limiting the flexibility of the statute, which might otherwise exclude the service members and veterans from using the full benefit. VACOE would like some consideration given to changing the Post-9/11 Bill living stipend conditions to include distant learning and on-line courses because the learning environment has incorporated the use of new technologies and the Internet to deliver educational courses.

Response: The Education Service met with VA's legal counsel to review application of the statutory provisions for payment of the housing allowance. As a result, our proposed rule contained language clarifying that distance education courses could be used to determine if the housing allowance was payable as long as the program itself was not pursued solely through distance learning.

Recommendation 4: Recommend VA propose legislation to allow on-the-job training (OJT) and apprenticeship recipients to be eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill and:

- A. Pay a yearly \$1,000 stipend to veterans in order to cover the cost of tools and equipment.
- B. Pay monthly housing allowance while veterans are in training.
- C. If a veteran is in an apprenticeship program and is charged tuition for the required instruction, he/she should have that paid under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
- D. Approve private sector OJT programs even if they are unable to provide pay raises to trainees because of economic downturn.

Response: The Committee's recommendations to propose legislation to improve benefits payable to trainees in on-the-job or apprenticeship programs will be considered during our yearly legislative review process.

Post-9/11 GI Bill Outreach VA Education Service

The following table identifies the outreach efforts of Education Service in promoting awareness of the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Veteran	School Organizations	Service Organizations
GI Bill Website	GA Association of Veterans Certifying Officials 7/24/08	VFW National Convention 8/16/08
Frequently asked Questions	Association of Veterans' Education Certifying Officials 7/23/08	American Legion National Convention 8/21/08
Post-9/11 GI Bill tri-fold pamphlet	Western Association of Veterans Education Specialists 7/20/08	Alabama Veterans Affairs Association 11/13/08
Post-9/11 GI Bill information poster	National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) Summer Conference 8/11/08	GA Department of Veterans Affairs 12/4/08
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States 8/17/08	NJ-NY Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers 10/29/08, 3/28/09	Wounded Warriors 12/12/08
Seminole Tribe Outreach 9/19/08	Tennessee School Certifying Official Workshop 9/8/08	National Assoc of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) Regional 2/23/09
Welcome Home- American Hero Celebration 10/18/08	Nebraska School Certifying Officials Workshop 9/22/08	OR Department of Veterans Affairs 2/9/09
Fort Drum, NY 12/11/08	Servicemen Opportunity College 10/23/08, 11/6/08	Student Veterans of America (SVA) Southern Conference 2/13/09
Walter Reed Education Fair 11/14/08	National Association of Veterans Program Administrators (NAVPA) 10/27/08	American Legion Economic 3/2/09
20 TAP Briefings (various locations)- Atlanta Regional Processing Office 8/08-1/09	Missouri Veterans Commission Annual Training 11/1/08	
Native American Outreach 11/5/08	Texas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers 11/4/08	
OK National Guard 1/31/09	Dept. of Education, Federal Student Aid Conference 10/28/08, 12/5/08	
Council of College and Military Educators 1/26/09	SC Association of School Certifying Officials 11/19/08	
All Veteran Letter (anticipated completion 3/09)	Middle States Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers 12/1/08	
	American Council on Education (ACE) 1/5/09, 1/9/09, 1/14/09	

Veteran	School Organizations	Service Organizations
	National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) 2/3/09	
Major Media	Southern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators 2/9/09	
Air Force Times 7/8/08	National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) Mid-Winter Conf. 2/23/09	
Washington Post 7/8/08	Veteran Program Administrators of California 2/26/09	
Army Times 7/21/08		
Washington Times 9/4/08		
Marine Corps Times 9/10/08		
Military.com 9/23/08		
Chronicle of Higher Education 11/7/08		
Inside Higher Education 12/29/08		
Stars and Strips 1/24/08		

Anticipated Events		
Veteran	School Organizations	Service Organizations
WV National Guard (3/12/09)	OK Association Veterans Coordinators & Counselors 3/12/09, 9/8/09	Student Veterans of America (SVA) National Conference 4/18/09
American Society of Military Comptrollers 5/26/09	Missouri School Certifying Official (SCO) Workshop 3/18/09	VFW National Convention 8/15/09
DOD Worldwide 7/27/09	The Association for Counselors and Educators in Government 3/19/09	American Legion National Convention 8/21/09
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States 8/9/09	Florida Association of Bursars & Student Accounting Administrators (FABSAA) 3/25/09	
National Guard Association of the United States 9/11/09	GA Association of Veterans Certifying Officials 3/31/09	
	CA School Workshops-multiple held statewide 3/09-4/09	
	American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) 4/5/09	
	Iowa School Certifying Official (SCO) Workshop 4/7/09	
	Distance Education and Training Council (DETC) 4/7/09	

Veteran	School Organizations	Service Organizations
	Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (ACRAO) 4/15/09	
	AZ Veterans Program Association Conference 4/15/09	
	North Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NCASFAA) 4/20/09	
	Eastern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (EASFAA) 5/19/09	
	Kansas School Certifying Official (SCO) Workshop 5/28/09	
	National Association of Veterans Program Administrators (NAVPA) 5/31/09	
	National Association of State Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) 7/12/09	
	Western Association of Veterans Education Specialists (WAVES) 7/19/09	
	Association of Veterans' Education Certifying Officials (AVECO) 7/28/09	