

Education Budget Committee
Testimony on House Bill 2652

by

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On behalf of the University of Kansas Collegiate Veterans Association
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I want to start off by thanking you, the members of the Education Budget Committee, for allowing me to speak with you about House bill 2652. I'd also like to thank you for giving me the best excuse I've had to date to miss a college class. Today, I hope I can clarify how House bill 2652 will benefit both the state of Kansas and military veterans. I also intend to address concerns you may have with the bill.

My name is Sara Sneath. I was born and raised in Kansas, although I have to admit I would not be the woman I am today without the mentoring I received in the United State Marine Corps. I served five and half years in the Corps, before returning to Kansas in 2009 to pursue a triple major in journalism, Spanish and sociology. I will be the first in my immediate family to attain a bachelor's degree, but with three degrees I'll have enough to share.

In December of 2010, I began working in the Veterans Services office at KU. It was there that I became aware that military education benefits do not pay the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition. Up until August of 2011, this was less of a problem; before the August 2011 changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the VA would pay a cap per credit hour of \$420.05. This cap covered part of the difference between in-state and out-of-state rates. However, in August this cap went away and veterans were left footing the entire difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition. If you look at the handout I gave you, you'll see the results of this change.

Based on 2012 KU Comprehensive Fee Schedule

Before August 2011 Changes

\$650 (undergrad out-of-state rate) - \$420.05 (VA cap) = \$229.95 (cost per credit hour)

\$229.95 X 12 credit hours = \$2,759.40 out of pocket cost per semester

After August 2011 Changes

\$650 (undergrad out-of-state rate) - \$253.70 (in-state rate) = \$396.30 (cost per credit hour)

\$396.30 X 12 credit hours = \$4,755.60 out of pocket cost per semester

As you can see, the amount of money out-of-state veterans must pay is significantly higher now. I will explain later how even these numbers may deemphasize the problem, but before I do, I want to call attention to the fact that House bill 2652 is more necessary now than ever. This bill is not radical: Other states have recognized the necessity and implemented similar bills, including Colorado, Arizona, Ohio and Virginia. I'd also like to point out that giving in-state tuition to students who would otherwise be paying out-of-state rates is an incentive KU and the state of Kansas have used in the past to attract certain desired cohorts of students. And, from the research the Collegiate Veterans Association has done, we believe that this bill will act more as an incentive to bring veterans to Kansas than it will to benefit those veterans who are already here.

I'd like to take a moment to tell you why veterans are such a desirable group.

Today's veterans joined the military during a time of war, and served in the military during a time of war. As they make the transition back to civilian life, we want them to be able to serve our Kansas communities. In return, we ask that the Kansas community serve them. Veterans are unlike other students in that they are older and are more likely to be married and have children, because of this they often settle down wherever they go to college. When veterans settle down they are eligible for VA loans to buy homes. In addition, companies that employ veterans reap the benefits of specific tax credits. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs 2009 State Summary, in 2009 alone, veterans brought 732 million dollars in VA expenditures to the state of Kansas, through compensation and pensions, readjustment benefits, medical and construction programs and insurance and indemnities. Now that I have explained why this cohort of students is desirable, I'd like to address why it is necessary that they be given in-state tuition.

Some of you may have heard about the Yellow Ribbon Program. The YRP is designed to offset the difference between what the Post-9/11 GI bill pays and private institution tuition rates and or out-of-state tuition rates. The YRP is a program that schools can opt into with the VA. The school chooses the number of recipients and the amount of tuition and fees that it will contribute, which the VA will match. To be eligible for the YRP a student must be entitled to the maximum benefit rate. Bradley, the combat disabled veteran you heard from today, is not eligible for the Yellow Ribbon Program because he did not get discharged for his service related disability nor did he serve 36 months of aggregate active duty service.

The University of Kansas has 25 YRP slots available. However, there are currently only 24 out-of-state students who qualify for those slots. This semester those students are paying a total of \$55,217.86 out-of-pocket, because the Post-9/11 GI Bill together with the YRP is not enough.

Remember when I told you that the numbers deemphasize the problem? Now, I'm going to tell you why.

If students who qualify for the YRP or students who are not at the eligibility rating which would allow them to qualify for the YRP seek outside financial assistance, they are penalized by the VA. These students cannot accept any grant or scholarship that is designated specifically for tuition and fee purposes. If they do, the VA takes this money out of the money it pays toward tuition and fees. These programs are so convoluted and bureaucratic that they may look all encompassing, but they leave many veterans out in the cold, without the resources that they require to make the transition to the civilian life that they so desire.

If you have understood the majority of the VA rules and stipulations I have outlined today, you are ahead of the curve. Imagine if you were in a combat zone with shotty Internet trying to apply for college and navigate these rules...

Today I have told you how House bill 2652 will benefit both the state of Kansas and military veterans. I have also addressed a few of the concerns you may have had with the bill. With the current reduction in armed forces, more military veterans – with entitlement to federal benefits – are looking for a place to pursue their education goals, a place they will eventually call home. We believe that with House bill 2652 military veterans will find that home in Kansas.

Again, I want to thank the Education Budget Committee for the opportunity to speak today. Are there any questions?