

Education Budget Committee

Testimony on House Bill 2652

By

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The American Legion Department of Kansas

Monday, February 20, 2012

Mr. Chairman and members of the Education Budget Committee, on behalf of The American Legion Department of Kansas I wish to express our organizations sincere appreciation for granting me the opportunity to address you today in favor of House Bill 2652.

When American Legion Past National Commander Harry Colmery of Topeka put pen to paper in the Mayflower Hotel during the winter of 1943 and became the author of the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, more commonly known as the original GI Bill of Rights, he did so without regard for boundaries of any kind. There is no mention in the original GI Bill of Rights of race, gender, or of foreign or domestic military service, and not one word about state boundaries. Colmery and other leaders in The American Legion recognized the need to provide every citizen who served to protect this nation and our allies from tyranny, regardless of their station in life prior to their honorable military service, not only a simple opportunity to rejoin their civilian counterparts, but also an enhanced opportunity to improve themselves, their families, and society as a whole.

What transpired immediately after World War II transformed America and established a robust middle class poised to create the growth and prosperity this nation enjoyed during the post-war years. Higher education was no longer reserved for the wealthy and the elite; if GI Joe or Jane could qualify for acceptance at any college or university in the country, they were entitled to attend, and the GI Bill paid the tab for books and tuition plus a monthly allotment for living expenses. A direct result of this infusion of veterans into

our colleges and universities was an elevation of standards across the board due to increased competition in every class room, brought on by veterans whose ingrained discipline and focus raised the bar for everyone in the educational system. In the following years, our nation reaped incalculable benefits in every conceivable manner.

Today's active duty personnel as well as their counterparts in the Guard and Reserve Forces, and recently discharged veterans of all services are the best trained and equipped military men and women in our history, and are among the most technically skilled and highly trained citizens this nation has ever produced. That places Kansas in a very unique position to take advantage of their prior training and experience and their drive to better themselves, and to succeed.

Thousands of military families reside in our state and hundreds of veterans are discharged annually from military installations in Kansas. We need to take advantage of our position by providing every means possible to attract these young people to our Kansas colleges and universities, and to retain their skills and their dedication for the benefit of our state.

Each of us is aware of the enormous economic impact the United States military has on our state. Almost every year there is at least one bill placed before you to enhance Kansas' attractiveness to the military and, their families and to veterans. I believe there has been at least one such bill introduced this session and I would ask you to add House Bill 2652 to the list of initiatives Kansas has taken to make our state more livable and more attractive to those with a military background.

In summary some may argue if we as Kansas tax payers can provide in-state tuition rates for the children of illegal immigrants we should at a minimum provide the same consideration to those who have honorably served in the

military. Others may make the case that today's veterans served to protect our entire nation and Kansas' in-state tuition benefit should not be restricted solely to those who happened to live here before their military service. Both are very valid arguments in favor of HB 2652. But without arguing the merits of in-state tuition for those who may or may not be legal, or that our nation's veterans served to protect all of our nation's borders I would ask you to also consider the potential economic benefits HB 2652 could provide for Kansas in the form of every conceivable purchase of retail goods and services by military families and veterans who choose to attend a Kansas College or University. These purchases would translate into long term job growth with relatively little investment of state funds. HB 2652 will boost Kansas' reputation as a state both friendly and attractive to active duty military and to veterans and it also will also enhance the value of a degree earned in Kansas by some of our nation's most serious and dedicated students.

Thank you once again for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you in favor of HB 2652. I sincerely urge your support of its passage, and stand for your questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Charles M. Yunker".

Charles M. Yunker, Adjutant
The American Legion
Department of Kansas