



VETERANS EDUCATION SUCCESS

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U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy meets with Louisiana Veterans about GI Bill Issues

Active duty and former service-members earn educational benefits through Honorable service, but some schools target Veterans with dishonorable practices

LAFAYETTE – U.S. Senator Dr. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) met recently with a group of Louisiana military veterans who were targeted for fraud when they utilized their GI Bill educational benefits. From excessive fees to deceptions about their schools' accreditation, tuition, and other key facts, to being signed up for loans they had not authorized, Louisiana Veterans have faced numerous unethical practices by schools eager to cash in on their federal benefits.

Terrance Edmonds from Avondale, Louisiana served in the Louisiana Air Force Reserves for eight years from 2001 until 2008. During his enlistment Terrance deployed twice overseas, first to Turkey in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, then to Kurdistan for Operation Enduring Freedom. After his Honorable discharge, Terrance used a combination of federal loans and his Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits to attend the now-defunct ITT Technical Institute in St. Rose. He studied computer electronics engineering technology (CEET) from 2010 to 2013, and eventually earned his associate's degree. Terrance worked several months before returning to ITT Tech in 2014 with the goal of completing his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering/project management. Unfortunately, ITT Tech went bankrupt and closed its doors before Terrance could finish his studies, leaving him with more than \$16,000 in student debt, and a worthless degree that employers have explicitly rejected. Terrance is currently employed, but in a position he held prior to his enrollment at ITT Tech. With the passage of the *Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017*, Terrance stands to receive a full restoration of his GI Bill educational benefits, which were unfairly squandered at no fault of his own.

Renee Seruntine from Metairie, Louisiana enlisted in the Louisiana Army National Guard as an air traffic control technician in 2008. Now a public affairs specialist, Renee deployed to Afghanistan with her unit in 2013. Prior to her military service, from 2004 to 2005 Renee used a combination of private and federal loans to attend Full Sail University in Winter Park, Florida. Aside from high tuition costs that rival many Ivy League schools, Full Sail recruiters made various promises that ended up not being true. For example, students were told their teachers worked closely for top industry professionals with whom potential employment was likely if not assured. Unfortunately, Renee received no post-graduation employment assistance, but instead found herself more than \$60,000 in debt. After several years, that amount ballooned to nearly \$100,000. With help from Veterans Education Success, Renee submitted a Borrower's Defense application earlier this year, and her federal loans have since been in deferment.

Shelby Horne from Denham Springs, Louisiana enlisted as a heavy equipment operator in the U.S. Army National Guard in 2009. During his enlistment, Shelby used his GI Bill educational benefits to enroll in the Drafting and Design Technology program at the now-defunct ITT Technical Institute in Baton Rouge. He based his decision on many fraudulent claims by school officials, like that the ITT Tech was properly accredited, and that his GI Bill benefits through VA would cover one-hundred percent of his schooling costs. Unfortunately, these were the first of many lies he was told by school officials. In 2013, Shelby deployed with his unit to Afghanistan for one year, during which time his daughter was born. Prior to his departure he took the necessary precautions and filled out paperwork to give the school proper notice of his deployment, which should have automatically put all dealings on hold. Instead, school officials chose to turn his accounts over to a credit collection agency, which, in addition to violating federal law, tarnished his credit. Additionally, coursework about piping design, a necessary skill, was removed without explanation. As he was preparing to graduate in 2014, ITT Tech was quickly gaining a poor public reputation, but Shelby was continually reassured by school officials that no problems existed. Yet shortly after, the school declared bankruptcy and closed its doors. Shelby is currently employed, but in a position he held prior to his graduation from ITT Tech. Now, Shelby is stuck with a degree that holds no value, he is unable to transfer his credits, and he remains burdened with more than \$25,000 in federal student loan debt. With help from Veterans Education Success, Shelby submitted a Borrower's Defense application last December, and his loans have since been in deferment.

“We are grateful to Senator Bill Cassidy for his leadership and for meeting today with these defrauded veterans to offer his assistance,” said Tyson Manker, Veterans Advocate at [Veterans Education Success](#), which provides free assistance to veterans who were deceived or defrauded by a college. “Too many colleges see veterans as nothing more than dollar signs in uniform. America’s heroes should be treated with honor and respect when they become college students, not targets for consumer fraud.”

“Making sure veterans and their families receive the benefits and care they deserve is a top priority,” said [Dr. Cassidy](#). “The Veterans Educational Assistance Act, which also expands the Yellow Ribbon Program to the children and spouses of service members who made the ultimate sacrifice, demonstrates our commitment to our veterans and their families.”

Lawmakers in Congress have taken action to restore benefits to some student veterans who, through no fault of their own, were targeted with fraudulent and deceptive practices by unethical colleges and schools. For example, H.R. 3218 the ‘*Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017*’ was recently signed into law, and will provide relief to veterans who attended now-defunct colleges. Senator Cassidy has been a leader in the fight to protect student veterans, and is an original co-sponsor of this legislation, the full text of which you can read [here](#).

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