Comments on VA's Proposal to Waive the Ethics Law

Comment
I served in multiple deployments over seas during my 8 year enlistment. Before I got out I had enrolled in college. I decided the best thing for me was to attend ITT. The recruiters there assured me that I would be able to achieve my Bachelors degree in the 36 month time frame that I had. Needless to say I am not 10K in debt, I took the max allowance of credits as I could and that promise of getting my degree in 36 months was never achieved. I had on a number of occasions had to go to the Dean of the school and complain about the lack of care that the teachers provided. I let us if they were just there to collect paycheck. One instance a teacher was let go but not until he had administrated 3 of my classes. The thought of getting a job right after graduation was out of the picture. I went to ITT thinking that I would receive a job after graduation and be able to support myself and my family. My current job has nothing to do with my education that I received. For you to allow employees to accept bribes from for profit fraud institutions is disgusting. You are supposed to be protecting us from things like this not paying for us to be taken advantage of. Money for one person could ruin an entire family.

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Comment
This is wrong unethical and immoral. I went to DeVry university they lie to myself and many other veterans about fees and student loans for which I'm still trying to fight to have dismissed as they were also done for several violations and also my grad. I feel like my country not how I feel my country isn't earning myself and the thousands of other veterans and I say no more.

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Comment
I was debriefed from three for-profit colleges: Lincoln College of Technology, Brown Mackie and ITT Technical Institute. Those recruiters use aggressive tactics to get me to sign up for classes and promise me things I have never come to pass. The degrees that I received from these institutions are almost useless because most companies don't take for-profit college seriously. In the process of almost finishing my Bachelors degree in Cyber Security the institution that I was attending went bankrupt and resulted in the Marshalling of my GI Bill benefits.

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Comment
I’ve already lost a good portion of my GI Bill to ITT Tech so why screw over all other veterans with the same problem. Oh yea do I get these benefits back? Noo.

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Comment
This is absolutely absurd! How are we, as student veterans, supposed to be protected if this happens? And why did the current presidential administration put a former official of a for-profit university (DeVry), which settled a law suit in disregard of misleading and defrauding students, in charge of the Department of Education enforcement unit? This makes no sense to me, and quite frankly infuriates me to no end. I feel like there are current "backdoor" deals going on to protect those in power from investigation, along with negotiations for kickbacks to those protecting the parties currently defrauding students. How are defrauded students supposed to achieve any level of justice? I feel like I'm at a complete loss.

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Comment
Well, in a nutshell, the GI Bill ruined my life. The things going on at the school I attended were criminal, disgusting and unethical. I had no way of knowing this until I enrolled. I was advised by a VSO rep and the Texas Veteran Commission to withdraw and find another school. I owed $10,000 debt that I am still currently paying at the rate of $600 a month. The VA had a lump sum of over $21,000 to this school which is only a barber college that would take 10 to 12 months to complete at most. I wrote my congressmen Louis Gohmert. I went through the principles of excellence and submitted numerous complaints to them and other state agencies and no one helped me. The VA director replied to me through congressman Louis Gohmert to tell me that I have a problem to submit a complaint which was done weeks prior. The original debt was about $10,000 but is about $10,000 right now. After my situation, I met other veterans who had went to the same school and had similar issues and also got in debt. These veterans had other issues with the school as well. It was common knowledge that the school paid kickbacks for preschool schools. The school never paid any of the money which would have been 75%. A few years ago I tried to commit suicide but was saved by my wife, and has not really thought about most until this situation happened. PTSD, Depression, but none of that relates to some people I never used my degrees as a crutch or anything like that and many people didn't know I had it until I was in the newspaper. Now I can't even get a job, and I can't afford to move. So this is my life if you can call it living. I think all those who use the GI Bill should have the same VSO rep at the school because I had no one to represent me as a person so being a veteran didn't make things any better. They just tell you get in the car and drive over there. I hope they do something about this school. I don't work for the VA anymore and I don't know what will happen for veterans and better for schools and VA employees. Who writes this crap? The only reason they want to legalize this shit is because they have already been paying them. The VA isn't helping people now but they went insane, hell no! This is the worst thing they could ever come up with. It's going to be harder to get people to fight wars in the future when this is the crap they go through when they come home. Who the hell wants to be a veteran?

I sometimes give other veterans rides to the VSO's office that was supposed to help me with my situation. While being up there a few weeks ago, the VA rep told me that another veteran was having issues with the school something about what was on their transcript. I just sat back and listen, but the guy was talking about the school paying kickbacks for preschool schools. I told him I had a similar situation and to contact the congressman. I hope the VA will do something with these problems. We need to quit giving the GI Bill to people who are not using it correctly. If a student has a job they need to go and do it. If the student has a problem they need to go to their school and come up with a solution. If the school is not doing the right thing they need to go to the VA and let them know. We need to have a system that works for veterans and not the other way around. I now have a friend that is an owner goes to the VSO and it's a friendly visit to say hey I hope you're not badmouthing me because we have been working together for a long time. The owner even leaves flyers and brochure for his school on display at the VSO office. The 2 of them grew up on the same street went to the same school, it does not take a genius to put 2 and 2 together. How can you fight something when it seems like the people that are supposed to be helping you are part of it.

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Comment
I worked in colleges and universities for over 30 years. Students new to the experience, especially adult students are seldom prepared to ask the important questions that would help them make an informed decision. Adult students are more anxious that 18 year old students who have few of the life experiences that or email bring to their college experiences.

These questions include:

1) Will my credit transfer to a state school AND COUNT TOWARD MY DEGREE?

A note here, if a for-profit school is not accredited by the same body as the school the student transfers to the answer to that question is "probably not." HOWEVER the response for for profit gets more training to give that question is "that depends." Over the years I've talked to dozens of students who came to my knowledge were now finding out that their credits based on promise made by the for profit reps.

2) What percentage of your graduates are working? What is their average income when they are hired, and after five years?

I encourage members of the committee to assign staff to call various schools and ask those questions. Data will likely not be offered. Instead there are "success stories" of a few alumni. If they ask to speak to those alumni, will they be able to?

The report, Subprime Opportunity, by the Education Trust, found that in 2008, only 21 percent of the in-time, full-time bachelor's degree students of for-profit colleges over all graduate within three years, compared with 65 percent at public institutions and 67 percent at private nonprofit colleges.

And the U.S. Department of Education NGES document which I was unable to attach indicates the same. The URL is https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40

Our Vets deserve the best and it's just not a big deal if there are a few stocks that VA employees can't own. Unless, of course, it is your hope that they will steer our Vets to those schools.

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Comment
I've experienced issues with an FFRP Educational Institution. FTI Tech Institute displayed those practices where all of my Post 911 GI Bill was used for school, however I never got a job which they promised and now I'm saddled with a worthless degree which is not recognized by any school. I need to recoup my funds but I do not know how complete the process. I want to attend another school but currently do not have the funds to pay for the school.
Comment

It embarrasses me that I even have to write that Bribery, yes Bribery, is wrong. VA employees should not be allowed to be bribed by colleges or for-profit schools.

I was scammed by a for-profit school while I was in the service. Those places shouldn't be in business let alone have advertisements on VA grounds or Military campuses. I was $60,000 in debt with an 'education' I couldn't use. I even used some of my benefits to pay for it. Vets who went to Corinthian or Westwood can not get their benefits back.

I should not have to write this. For-profit schools should not be eligible for GI or any government subsidies, period.

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Comment

It's time to clean out the blood sucker who only have the interest of politics and greed and not the interest of those who have suffered so much and deserve free health care and most of all schooling. This plan make me sick knowing that some a-hole would even think about passing this, whom ever it is.....YOUR FIRED.

Royce Garcia
Veteran US ARMY

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Comment

The VA should be considering the best interest of the veterans they serve. In my opinion it would be a conflict of interest if VA employees accepted incentives from agencies and for-profit schools they oversee. It would turn into a situation of favor for favor especially when these for-profit schools take advantage of these soldiers and their educational benefits. I personally encounter financial issues with my school on a regular basis especially when I have to depart from school for military reasons in the middle of a financial semester. One year I had to repay my school money that I never received toward my education nor was a stipend. I had no way to dispute the issue because it was the school's way or no way. Please do not allow colleagues to continue to take advantage or have the upper hand against our military students.

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Comment

Veterans should always be at the forefront of decisions within the VA agency. Allowing FOR-PROFIT academic institutions to “pay off” the VA to compensate for ripping Veterans off of their education benefits is the most asinine thing you have come up with. These institutions should be held accountable for their deceitful business practices.

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Comment
The VA's primary concern should be veterans, not whether its employees can make extra money off the job. Please don't go forward with this proposal. Myself, my husband, my son's father, and many people close to me have served and are still serving in the military, and the VA needs to protect the veterans of this country.

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Comment
Don't scrap the ethics law! Colleges that want the GI Bill should not be allowed to pay off VA employees.*

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Comment
I foresee nothing but corruption. This can easily and I tell you from experience that it will cost us and screw us greatly. Look at Chicago's fall it was all because of mismanagement of contracts and this is a major cuprit of it. Please do take Chicago as a great model for what can happen

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Comment
This should not be enacted. For profit schools are predatory, especially when it comes to the GI Bill. Please DO NOT allow this change to go into effect. Our veterans deserve more.

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Comment
This proposed change makes absolutely no sense and as a combat veteran and student I oppose making it easier for corruption to take place without any demonstrated need through quantifiable or qualitative evidence. Please reject this rule.
It goes without saying that VA’s primary concern should be veterans, not whether its employees can make extra money off the job. Please don’t go forward with this proposal.

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Comment
These for-profit schools do not have the veterans best interests in mind. Like so many other organizations, for-profit schools see veterans as a revenue source, nothing more. By allowing the employees of the VA to accept what is basically a bribe to influence former military to spend their GI bills at their institutions, the VA is putting profit first and veterans second.
Has the VA learned nothing from schools like ITT Tech? Thousands of veterans have wasted their GI benefits. On top of the degrees being worthless, the credits at these for-profit school don’t transfer making higher education impossible.
It is simply irresponsible to sell out veteran’s futures like this.

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Comment
Rolling back ethics rules that prevent VA employees from investing in for-profit colleges is a terrible idea. No VA employee, and no VA client should be exposed to conflict of interest that this would engender. VA employees can find somewhere to invest where they are free of any temptation to manipulate clients for financial reward. The rules are meant to protect veterans from abuse by employees with a vested interest in recommending certain educational institutions, and they should remain in place.

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Comment
My name is Dr. Dahn Shauls. I am a US Army veteran, independent researcher and activist who has been investigating predatory for-profit colleges for several years.
I have also written and published reports on subprime colleges and the lead generators they use to prey on service members, veterans, and their families. Sadly, the military services and VA have chosen to side with these predatory companies rather than protecting those who have served.
The VA’s attempt to end this conflict of interest rule shows how little the Trump Administration cares about its veterans. And I am not surprised.

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Comment
Terrible idea. The VA is a joke already and they don't need any more power or control. I think we should do away with the organization all together. Private care paid for and the pension restructured to benefit the veteran not line their pockets. Over the VA!!

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Comment
See attached file(s)
Comment in response to “Notice of Intent and Request for Comment: Employees Whose Association With For-Profit Educational Institutions Poses No Deterrent to Veteran”
The Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN) strongly opposes this proposed change in current regulations. If enacted, it will allow Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) employees to receive wages, salary, dividends, profits, royalties and/or services from or to their own interest in for-profit institutions that accept GI Bill-based tuition payments. This would allow DVA employees to seek personal profit from these institutions rather than to provide oversight of them to ensure student veterans are treated fairly and receive a quality education in exchange for the GI Bill-based tuition payments these institutions collect. Too many of these for-profit institutions have engaged in questionable marketing practices in recruiting veterans and too many student veterans enrolled in for-profit institutions have experienced poor educational outcomes. In fact, the recently passed Harry W. Coluny Veterans Educational Assistance Act includes provisions to help veterans not be unduly harmed by these actions taken by certain of these institutions. Now is not the time to loosen ethics rules that protect our veterans.

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Comment
This is one of the worst ideas I’ve ever seen. There is no need for the corrupt VA to have the ability to become more corrupt. Please kill this bill for all Veterans. If you care about standing for a flag so much but don’t see the hypocrisy in this than you need to wake up and remove your head from your ass.

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Comment
The VA’s primary concern should be veterans, not whether its employees can make extra money off the job. Please don’t go forward with this proposal. I currently serve in the Army and I’m a Veteran.

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Comment
Please do not change this ethics policy. It opens the way to massive conflicts of interest.

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Comment
Please keep the existing ethics law in place. Thank you

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Comment
As the grandson of veterans and a member of a family that relies heavily on the G.I. bill, I strongly disagree with the Department of Veterans Affairs decision to allow its employees to take contributions and own stock in the same for-profit colleges it regulates. Veterans are uniquely vulnerable to for-profit colleges. Federal law requires at least 10% of for-profit funding come from private funds but allows G.I. funding to be counted as private funds. This creates an enormous economic incentive for predatory for-profit colleges that are often of low quality and high priced, to disproportionately target veterans and their families.

Evidence the loophole has caused for-profit colleges to aggressively market to veterans is abundant. A 2014 Senate H.E.L.P. Committee report found in the 2012-2013 school year, for-profit colleges were given $1.7 billion in G.I. bill benefits, which was nearly the cost of the entire G.I. program four years early. Reveal News found that recruiters for the University of Phoenix were allowed to give gifts to troops and insert marketing materials into official welcome packets for newly arriving soldiers. The Huffington Post found websites with military audiences like Military.com and GIJobs.com use online ads to lure and scam veterans into enrolling for-profit colleges. Congress has failed to act to close this loophole, it should be up to the V.A. to protect veterans and their families like my own, from these fraudulent institutions. Unfortunately, this new regulation will allow for-profit colleges to legally influence important V.A. decisions through corruption and bribery.

In its justification, the V.A.'s main argument is the law is too broad and could have detrimental effects for employees, especially lower-level employees who want to teach or learn at these institutions. The V.A. points to two of its employees that could have been fired for teaching at for-profit colleges. Part D of the statute already solves the problem of ambiguity by allowing the V.A. to waive the statute for specific employees that will not cause any detriment to veterans. By the V.A.'s own admission, the law won't continue to work because the adjunct professors the notice mentioned were absolved of any wrongdoing, granted waivers and allowed to continue working at the V.A. and teach classes. The law is not too vague because it allows for exceptions in specific cases as it has done in the past and will continue to do.

Instead of only waiving the statue for the few specific individuals, which was Congresses intent with the statute, the V.A. waived the statute for all $30,000 of its employees. This while not providing any valid evidence or assurances those employees will not be hired by for-profit colleges. The V.A.'s proposed actions make Veterans more vulnerable to institutions that are notorious for high prices, high dropout rates, little money spent on instruction and are under numerous investigation for deceptive practices. I strongly recommend the Department of Veterans Affairs to withdraw its notice "Employees Whose Association With For-Profit Educational Institutions Poses No Detriment to Veterans" and instead take steps to ensure veterans, their families and taxpayers are protected from the predatory actions for-profit colleges have and continue to take.

Sources Cited:
