

A Quality Education for All: Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Holds Hearing on Military's Efforts to Oversee Distance Learning and For-Profit Colleges

Washington, D.C. – Today, Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman Vic Snyder (D-Ark.) and Ranking Member Rob Wittman (R-Va.) convened a hearing to receive testimony from Department of Defense officials on their efforts to assess the quality of college education programs available to off-duty service members using government-provided tuition assistance funding. This year about 380,000 military personnel will use \$580 million in funding from the Department of Defense to participate in college programs.

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“Military personnel continue to seek out college education opportunities even with today’s high operations tempo and deployments, and it is critical that they receive good value for the time and resources invested,” said **Chairman Snyder**. “DOD and the services have had effective processes to manage college programs located on military installations. In the last decade, however, the education environment has changed dramatically with distance learning becoming the predominant method because of its flexibility and portability. And, although for-profit schools have become increasingly popular, the onus is on the Department, services, and Congress to ensure the rigor of their programs. The bottom line is we must insist that all schools that accept tuition assistance funding offer a quality education and not just a degree.”

Ranking Member Wittman said, “Educational incentives have long been a hallmark of the American Armed Services, especially with the end of the draft and the advent of the all volunteer force more than 40 years ago. From the original GI Bill to the Montgomery GI Bill and now the Post 9/11 GI Bill, the chance to earn a college degree has helped persuade young Americans to join the Armed Services and improve their quality of life. The increased level of education of our service members benefits not only the individual but the services themselves where nearly all of the approved courses of study can be applied to a military job environment. Nevertheless, the shift to distance learning offered by for-profit universities, combined with substantial, growing funding should be examined to ensure DOD’s Voluntary Education Program is still delivering the promised value. With this review, we want to be sure that both the

taxpayer and the service member are getting value for the considerable tuition funding provided within the defense budget.”

Witnesses at today's hearing included Robert Gordon, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy; Anthony Stamilio, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civilian Personnel and Quality of Life; Scott Lutterloh, Director of the Total Force Requirements Division for the Navy; Dan Sitterly, Director of Force Development for the Air Force; and Timothy Larsen, Director of the Personal and Family Readiness Division for the Marine Corps.

The witnesses discussed the evolution of the military's voluntary education programs and their plans to improve oversight of distance learning and for-profit schools. A variety of government and public interest organizations have raised concerns that some for-profit schools provide a lower quality of education, use overly aggressive recruiting practices, and have poor student outcomes. DOD and the services have traditionally focused on colleges that have established programs on military bases, but now plan to increase their oversight of these newer programs.