October 9, 2019

The Honorable Lamar Alexander

United States Senate

455 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Washington, DC. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander,

On behalf of the Reserve Organization of America (ROA), I offer our appreciation for your bi-partisan focus on legislation related to reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

In an August opinion piece in The Hill, I wrote that efforts to close the 90/10 loophole are “hob-bling education options through murkily concocted ratios that limit how much GI Bill money the “proprietary” for-profits can receive. This limitation doesn’t, however, affect the more favored conventional education sector.”

Veterans and serving members of the Reserve Components don’t need excessive government paternalism. They are superbly trained adults entrusted with the defense of the nation and the preservation of their comrades to the right and left. They need information and options so they can advantageously use their earned benefits.

(It is my personal belief that if a school is delivering quality, there should be no limit on how much funding it can receive from federal programs.)

The argument that it’s the government’s responsibility to ensure “its” money is being used correctly by a GI Bill beneficiary is tricky business: once earned, it’s no longer Uncle Sam’s, just as a federal government employee’s or a military retiree’s or a VA benefit beneficiary’s compensation is not the government’s: it’s the beneficiary’s to use freely within the law. And any school that has earned state approving agency approval has earned “legal” status.

The military operates on standards applied to all. If Congress pursues a refinement of standards beyond those applied by state approving agencies, those standards should be applied to the entire education sector (with exceptions as provided for by the Minority Serving Institutions Program), not just the proprietary education sector.

ROA represents serving and separated members of the Reserve and National Guard. Many are using or will use their GI Bill money – or will transfer their benefits to family – to get good jobs in areas such as aviation, HVAC, commercial truck driving, and the culinary arts, to name a few. Applying arbitrary “ratios” devised to punish an entire sector for the transgressions of a few, and “protect” beneficiaries whose interests would be better served by quality information and consistent standards, will have one predictable effect: the limitation of choice for those who have earned it.

ROA recognizes that institutions of higher learning have not always behaved well. That, however, is no reason to hobble an entire sector and create government-chosen “winners” in the education market. The military education consumer needs and deserves information and uniform standards.

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We thank you for your bipartisan efforts to strike a balance that enhances the utility of education benefits for those who earned them, as they continue to serve their nation.

Respectfully,

Jeffrey E. Phillips

Maj. Gen., U.S. Army (Ret.)

Reserve Organization of America

Executive Director