

Michaud Provision Expanding VA Education Benefits to Cover Commercial Driver's License Training Advances

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"Current

law only provides such 'accelerated' payments for approved training programs that will lead to employment in the high-technology sector," said Michaud. "The transportation and construction industries face a critical shortage of employees now and in the near future. Nationwide, the trucking industry needs an additional 20,000 drivers today and expects to face a driver shortage of 110,000 drivers by 2014. The new benefit provided for in my amendment will help meet industry needs and provide our veterans with an affordable job training opportunity."

Accelerated benefits, which have been available for high-tech occupations since 2002, make short-term, high-cost training programs more attractive to veterans by paying benefits in a lump sum per term, and by covering a greater share (60%) of the cost of such programs. Michaud's amendment expands this program to eligible veterans seeking employment in the high demand field of commercial trucking.

Overall, the Veterans Education Improvement Act will help resolve current benefit shortfalls by substantially increasing the amount of basic education assistance for veterans equal to the average cost of the tuition at a four-year public college or university; providing veterans with a monthly cost of living stipend; and extending the time limitation for use of education benefits from 10 years to 15 years, more fully accommodating the transition from military to civilian life.

"The passage of this bill is historic," said Michaud. "Since World War II, the original Montgomery GI Bill has created opportunities for millions of veterans. This bipartisan update will help our newest generation of heroes access the American dream that they are risking their lives to defend."

H.R. 5684 also includes unique provisions that expand on current benefits by: allowing benefits to be used for business courses and preparatory courses for exams; allowing service members to repay federal student loans; allowing service members to enroll for the benefits at any time while on active duty; providing increased funding for State Approving Agencies, an important partner in administering the benefits with the VA; rewarding veterans for their service by eliminating their educational entitlements from being considered as income when applying for federal financial aid; increasing on the job training benefit to 85 percent; supplementing reporting fees given to colleges and universities; creating a five-year pilot program to expand work-study programs for veterans; increasing the VA's full time employees by 150 to help administer the new requirements; providing funding for updating existing IT systems; rearranging the "advance pay" process to prevent any break in benefits; allowing the spouse of 100 percent service disabled service member to use MGIB benefits up to 20 years; and increasing the existing Dependent Educational Assistance by ten percent.

Today's passage of H.R. 5684 in the full Veterans' Affairs Committee clears it for consideration before the full House of Representatives.