

Amends the GIVE Act to provide veterans with educational benefits through national service programs □ □

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Washington DC - Today, U.S. Congressman Duncan Hunter (R-CA) successfully offered an amendment to H.R. 1388, the GIVE Act, to remove GI bill benefits from the maximum educational award calculation for veterans who participate in national service programs.

Hunter delivered the following remarks on the House floor during consideration of the GIVE Act:

"I rise today to offer an amendment to H.R. 1388, the Generations Invigorating Volunteerism and Education (GIVE) Act, that ensures veterans are no longer denied the educational benefits they earn through national service programs. My amendment simply removes GI bill funds from the maximum educational award calculation so that veterans have full access to national service educational benefits.

"Under current law, individuals who participate in national service programs earn educational awards to support their postsecondary education. The total amount a student can draw-down for any one period takes into account the cost of attendance at an institution, Pell Grants and the amount a student receives in veterans educational benefits. In other words, veterans qualify for lower benefits if they choose to participate in national service programs.

"At some low-cost institutions, educational benefits provided to veterans through the GI bill either significantly reduce the national service award or deny access to this benefit altogether. In states such as California, where the true cost of living is not accurately captured by an institution's cost of attendance, veterans are often unfairly denied the educational award they earn for participation in national service programs.

"Full access to these benefits would make a significant difference for some students in high-cost areas, particularly when college costs continue to increase at a rate of six and seven percent a year. Additionally, removing GI bill benefits from the maximum educational award calculation would likely increase the enrollment of veterans in national service programs - an idea that I hope all of us would support.

"Our nation's veterans are experienced leaders with invaluable skills acquired through years of military service. These qualities make them ideal candidates for volunteer opportunities, yet only about 2% of the total AmeriCorps participants are veterans. That is due, in large part, to the fact that current law discourages this type of service among America's veteran population.

"National service programs provide important services that improve the lives of others. Increasing the enrollment of veterans in these programs will only serve to improve their quality and effectiveness.

"This amendment is consistent with provisions included in the Higher Education Opportunity Act enacted last year that excluded veterans' educational benefits from a student's eligibility for federal financial aid. Policies on veterans' educational benefits should be consistent. Students should not be denied the educational assistance they earn through volunteer programs because of their service in America's armed forces.

"I urge my colleagues to support this amendment so that we can build on our commitment to promote better educational opportunities for America's veterans."