

EAA, GA Groups Urge Preservation of Vets' Flight Training Funding

May 21, 2015 – EAA joined six other aviation associations Monday in signing [a letter](#) to the chairman and ranking member of the House Committee of Veterans Affairs, urging their committee to reject a bill (H.R. 476) that would impose a detrimentally low cap on Veterans Administration (VA) funding for college flight training degree programs for veterans.

H.R. 476 was introduced to close a loophole in the Post-9/11 GI Bill. It would impose a cap on funding of less than \$21,000 per year (including tuition and flight training) for a four-year degree program at a public institute of higher learning.

“This is a discriminatory proposal, as it singles out flight training programs while imposing no caps on any other course of study at public colleges or universities,” said Jack J. Pelton, EAA’s chairman of the board. “It is an overreaction that imperils not only helicopter flight training programs, but all flight training programs for veterans. It would cause more harm than good in giving our veterans opportunities to become professional pilots following their service to our nation.”

The loophole permitted virtually unlimited VA funding of fees associated with courses taken at public colleges - including flight training fees. It was compounded by inadequate and uneven application of VA regulations intended to apply market pressures to keep prices in check. When some flight schools took what the VA considered undue advantage of the loophole, the agency went to Congress to complain and ask for a change in the law that would cap the VA’s expenditures.

The associations have been working for more than two months to explain the consequences of H.R. 476 to the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunities, but the subcommittee sent the bill on to the full committee with the cap still in place. The forwarded legislation does include a one-year grandfather clause for veterans already in programs, and the subcommittee is recommending that the full committee extend the grandfather clause to two years.

The associations’ call on Congress not to vote on H.R. 476 and instead let the market forces regulation - known as the 85/15 rule because it requires that at least 15 percent of the students in any degree program not be receiving VA benefits - be given a chance to work, now that the VA has begun a more vigorous enforcement of the rule.

The associations also call on Congress to treat all degree programs equally, to encourage the use of flight simulators and discourage the use of higher-priced training aircraft such as turbine-powered helicopters, and to direct the Government Accountability Office to study best flight training practices with the intent of writing a new, data-driven law.

Joining EAA in signing the letter were the leaders of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), Helicopter Association International (HAI), the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA), the National Air Transportation Association (NATA), the National Association of State Aviation Officials (NASAO), and the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA).

In addition to the leaders of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, the letter went to the chairmen and ranking members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and the House and Senate Aviation subcommittees, as well as the co-chairs of both the House and Senate General Aviation caucuses.