

Ranking Member Richard Burr

Senator Burr Opening Statement
Committee Markup – August 5, 2010

Good morning, Mr. Chairman. I'll be brief with my remarks in light of the extensive agenda, including 8 amendments I have offered.

First, I'm pleased that legislation is on the agenda that the Chairman and I worked on that will improve transitional housing opportunities for veterans. I am hopeful this provision can be a part of our collective goal to end homelessness among America's veterans.

I'm also pleased we're addressing needed improvements to the new GI Bill. Back in 2008, before the Post-9/11 GI Bill became law, I went to the floor of the Senate to discuss my concern that basing a veteran's education benefits on the most expensive public college in the state where the veteran is going to school would create (quote) "a tremendous inequity."

Unfortunately, as it turned out, there are tremendous inequities with this new education program. As one example, a veteran going to a private college in North Carolina is eligible for about \$500 per credit hour for tuition. But a student in New York can receive more than twice that amount – even if their schools cost the same. And veterans' groups are now calling the state-by-state benefit system "unwieldy," "confusing," and "unpredictable."

So, Mr. Chairman, I am glad that the Committee Print of S. 3447 would help create a program that will be fair and generous, no matter where a veteran lives or chooses to go to school. On top of that, by taking steps such as covering vocational training, this bill would allow more veterans and their families to pursue the educational programs that best meet their needs. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate you working with me on this Committee Print and am happy to be able support it.

As for the "Claims Processing Improvement Act," I appreciate your willingness to take some of my concerns into account. In the months ahead, I look forward to working with you to ensure that this bill will lead to lasting improvements in the delivery of benefits and will not unduly impact veterans or the claims processing system.

On a final note, Mr. Chairman, I am again troubled that we're considering such an extensive agenda in the absence of views from the administration or cost estimates from the Congressional Budget Office. We held legislative hearings on these items back in May and, still, we either don't have views or only have views that have been submitted recently.

I find it interesting that soon after I filed an amendment to restrain the growth in the Office of Congressional Affairs' budget that employees of that office engaged in a lobbying campaign to defeat it. I presume they had OMB clearance to express those views...in which case it would be a record turnaround!

In any event, I would like to reserve my right to file minority views on any of the bills on today's agenda. Thank you Mr. Chairman