



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Eric Adams

## Senator Adams Co-Hosts a Senate Hearing on Veterans' Access to Higher Education

ERIC ADAMS May 19, 2010

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### **NYS Senator Eric Adams Co-Hosting a Hearing on Access for Veterans to Higher Education, Hears Testimony on Special Programs for War Veterans**

NYS Senator Eric Adams (Chair of the Senate Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs Committee) joined Senator Toby Ann Stavisky (Chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee) to co-host a public hearing to examine issues faced by veterans who seek higher education. The hearing took place on Monday, May 17, 2010 from 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM in Hearing Room A of the Legislative Office Building, Albany, NY 12247.

As current overseas military actions continue, an increasing number of veterans return home from deployment to face a weak economy and the need to understand their eligibility for new educational benefits. The Senate Majority Conference will use the information gathered at this hearing to develop comprehensive legislation to help veterans obtain the skills they need to succeed in the global economy.

The hearing provided an opportunity for a public discussion on methods to provide the proper services and benefits for student veterans and make the higher education environment more veteran friendly.

Testimony was provided by New York State leaders on education, education equality, and veterans' education, including:

- Dr. Pedro Caban, SUNY, Vice Provost for Diversity and Education Equity
- Linda Frank, Empire State College, Director, Veteran and Military Education
- Bill Kraus, New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs, Executive Deputy Director
- Joshua Kaplan, President, Albany Student Veterans Association

**Senator Adams states:** "It is of critical importance that we raise awareness of the challenges faced by veterans in higher education and develop methodology for addressing issues affecting the college-based veteran population. Veterans experience an elevated college drop-out rate, and we must maintain an adequate campus support system to assist the transition of veterans from military to civilian student life.

"We must sharpen the tools available to integrate veterans effectively into the student body and assist former military personnel to reap the benefits of the recently enacted 9/11 GI Bill. We are honor-bound to improve our campuses for those men and women who have given so much for our State and our nation; we must eradicate the obstacles facing veterans and ensure that they achieve success in our colleges and universities. Initiatives that attack the problems that veterans encounter in higher education are essential. This joint hearing is a first step."

As military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan continue, colleges have begun to see a greater number of veterans on their campuses. New York has 80,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans

and more than one million veterans in total. The State's public higher education system (SUNY and CUNY) is the largest in the nation, providing veterans with many options in terms of local institutions of higher learning. (Statistics show that military undergraduates are most likely to choose a college based on location.)

#### Problems Faced by Military Undergraduates:

There are a variety of issues that veterans deal with when enrolling in college. Military undergraduates encounter difficulties financing their education, managing time constraints, dealing with mental health problems, and transitioning from military life to student life.

Prior GI bills failed to keep pace with the rising cost of college tuition, making it very difficult for veterans to afford classes and devote their primary focus to their coursework. The tuition assistance provided by prior GI bills limited veterans to community colleges and other publicly funded universities, precluding enrollment at private (more expensive) colleges.

Further, many military undergraduates must balance family responsibilities with school and make the mental transition from combat zone to classroom. In 2007-2008, nearly half of all military undergrads were married; nearly half were raising children with or without a spouse.

Many veterans return from combat with pressing psychological and/or physical post-war trauma, making readjustment to personal relationships and new routines extremely difficult. Thus, the transition to a college lifestyle may be arduous and problematic.

#### New Soldiers, New GI Bill:

Since World War II, the U.S. Government has provided education benefits to military personnel, the first assistance stemming from the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944.

The initial GI Bill was generous to war veterans, providing a stipend for living expenses and full tuition payment directly to the college of enrollment. (Even the most expensive colleges were covered.)

The GI Bill has been modified (and scaled back) several times, and on July 1, 2008, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 was signed into law. Under it, military undergraduates with a minimum of three years active duty service are provided financial assistance for tuition, housing, and books and supplies. It covers 100% of state college tuition, and it provides an equivalent amount to those choosing to attend a private institution. (Those enrolled in more expensive graduate programs and private institutions become eligible for the Yellow Ribbon program, under which the Veterans Administration will match what a participating institution contributes to cover remaining costs.)

The new GI Bill has major flaws, however, because benefits cannot be used at non-degree-granting institutions or for apprenticeships. Further, part time and online students do not receive a housing stipend, a restriction that significantly affects the majority of military undergrads because these programs are made use of so frequently.

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