

HOUSE BILL NO. 2228
SENATE FEDERAL AND STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

State Capitol Building

Room 144 (S)

Testimony by
Charles M. Yunker, Adjutant
The American Legion Department of Kansas

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for providing The American Legion this opportunity to voice our organization's support in favor of House Bill 2228 as amended and approved by the House 123 – 0 on February 26. We urge your full support of this nation's veterans and their families and ask you to fend off any attempt to amend or dilute House Bill 2228 as amended.

Kansas has a long history of supporting veterans and for the most part the State has done well by those who have served to protect and defend our liberties. House Bill 2228 provides the Kansas Legislature the opportunity to send a message to the Department of Defense and those considering reducing the role of Ft. Riley that Kansas is in fact a veteran friendly state; a state that appreciates and values the sacrifices of veterans and their families. House Bill 2228 if adopted in its present form also sends a message to potential members of the National Guard, veterans and their families Kansas is a state that welcomes their work ethic, patriotism, sense of duty and obligation to their nation and their fellow citizens and that we value them as neighbors.

House Bill 2228 is patterned after the current Texas law which is the only law that has been found to be in 100% compliance with Section 702 of the Choice Act which requires all states to provide in-state tuition to veterans and their

families. This Bill as written has been reviewed and approved by the VA and will protect the \$104 million education benefits currently flowing into Kansas.

Failure to pass House Bill 2228 or to otherwise comply with Section 702 of the Choice Act will mean the loss of millions of dollars to the State of Kansas because our colleges and universities, trade schools, etc. will not be in compliance with federal law therefore the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs will have no choice but to decertify each and every institution.

Veterans look at what states have to offer in the way of benefits. You and you're your colleagues have the opportunity to insure they see a veteran friendly and welcoming attitude when they think Kansas.

Failure to provide in-state tuition to all veterans will not only affect those considering moving to Kansas to attend college, it will affect our own Kansas sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, etc. who elected to serve us in the military because they won't be able to use their educational benefits they invested in through the Montgomery GI Bill, and those they earned through the 911 GI Bill in their home state. This as a time when Kansans are being reminded of Harry W. Colmery, the Topeka attorney who authored the original GI Bill of Rights, a law that fundamentally changed America.

Anyone who opposes House Bill 2228 on the grounds of lost revenue due to the difference between in-state and out of state tuition fails to take into account the amount veterans will spend on food, housing, clothing, fuel, entertainment, and other purchases such as vehicles. All items that will generate jobs and tax revenue.

Opponents also fail to take into account HB 2228 will attract some of the most motivated and focused individuals our nation has to offer to our college campuses much like the original GI Bill did after World War II. There are

thousands of military personnel at Ft. Riley, Ft. Leavenworth and McConnell AFB, some of the best and brightest the military has to offer, why not offer them the opportunity to remain in Kansas, raise their families and help our economy grow. Many of whom will choose to make Kansas their permanent home.

Twenty states offer in-state tuition to “unauthorized immigrant” students including Kansas. Twenty states, including Kansas, currently place a greater value on illegal aliens than those who have served our state and nation in uniform. Failure to pass HB 2228 would essentially tell those who have risked life and limb they are not as valued or important as those who have broken our laws by their presence in our state.

Providing every patriot from every state in-state tuition rates is not only legally required, it is morally correct. When our servicemen and women put on the uniform and took an oath to defend our nation against all enemies foreign and domestic they didn’t include a caveat that only included their state. They protected America including Kansas and it is time for Kansas to show its gratitude.

Veterans currently account for over \$1.2 Billion in VA benefits to the Kansas economy. That’s with no gimmicks, no multipliers, just our Federal dollars returning to Kansas. Put simply this Bill is good economics. It is not a complicated issue and The American Legion asks for this committee’s support of HB 2228 and your continued support on the Senate Floor. We also ask you to stand against any attempt to amend or dilute it in its present form. Again thank you for providing The American Legion this opportunity today.