



May 17, 2016



The Honorable Johnny Isakson  
Chairman  
Committee on Veterans Affairs  
United States Senate  
205 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Veterans Affairs  
United States Senate  
706 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Blumenthal:



We applaud your leadership and the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee as a whole for their long-time support of our nation's veterans, particularly in allowing them to utilize their hard-earned benefits for flight training. This training enables veterans to pursue a well-paying civilian career with good long-term prospects in either the fixed- or rotary-wing aviation industry. This is important not only to our veterans but also assists our nation in meeting the burgeoning shortage of qualified pilots. With this well-deserved assistance, veterans can fill the cockpits of tomorrow's police and firefighting helicopters, air ambulances, charter and corporate aircraft, and commercial airliners.



As the Senate turns to consideration of the Veterans First Act, we urge you to oppose any proposals that would cap veteran flight training benefits. This is critical since we believe that veterans who want to pursue a career in aviation should be eligible for the same benefits as those pursuing other degrees at public institutions. We think a better path would be to focus the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on providing a more consistent and uniform application of the program's mandated benefits. While the VA has made improvements in its application of Vocational Rehabilitation GI Bill benefits as it pertains to flight training, that improvement is not universal across the VA system and results in unwarranted program costs.



We also oppose a cap because, absent significant personal financial resources, no veteran can attain an aeronautical college degree that includes earning a commercial pilot license. This impact is even more pronounced because these flight training programs do not qualify for a federally backed student loan and are treated by most financial institutions as an unsecured loan at interest rates often exceeding 12 percent. Given the pressing need for pilots in this country across all sectors, a cap would be counterproductive not only to veterans but our nation's economy as well.



We also stand ready to work with your Committee and the Senate to establish a joint working group of VA officials, aviation associations, collegiate educators, and flight training providers to evaluate the best course of action to ensure that veterans receive their promised educational benefits, enabling them to be career-ready as they re-enter the civilian workforce.





We appreciate your consideration of our request. We look forward to continuing our work with you and the VA to find a balance that will meet the educational needs and aspirations of our veterans who have the skill set and determination for successful careers in the aviation industry.



Mark R. Baker  
President, CEO  
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association

Jack J. Pelton  
Chairman of the Board  
Experimental Aircraft Association



Pete Bunce  
President, CEO  
General Aviation Manufacturers Association

Matthew S. Zuccaro  
President, CEO  
Helicopter Association International



Greg Principato  
President, CEO  
National Assn. of State Aviation Officials

Thomas L. Hendricks  
President, CEO  
National Air Transportation Association



Ed Bolen  
President, CEO  
National Business Aviation Association

Tim Canoll  
President  
Air Line Pilots Association, International



Christopher Eastlee  
President  
Air Medical Operators Association (AMOA)

Rick Sherlock  
President and CEO  
The Association of Air Medical Services (AAMS)

