NBAA SUPPORTS VA FLIGHT TRAINING, VOICES CONCERNS ABOUT BENEFIT CAPS

News / Business aviation, Maintenance / Trainings

NBAA on Sept. 16 reaffirmed its support for post-9/11 GI Bill flight-training **benefits**, and expressed concern about the consequences to veterans and the aviation industry if discriminatory proposals to impose a severe cap or impose other restrictions on those benefits are adopted.

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NBAA submitted its comments in a joint written statement with the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, the General Aviation Manufacturers Association, the Helicopter Association International (HAI), and the National Association of State Aviation Officials, to the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, which debated its proposal the day the letter was sent.

Noting that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has rules in place to ensure that market forces hold flight-training costs in check, the associations declared that the proposal to limit benefits is unnecessary. Inconsistent enforcement of the VA's 85/15 rule, which requires no more than 85 percent of the students enrolled in a flight-training degree program can have their education paid for with VA funds, led a few schools to charge more than market training rates.

To protect taxpayers from these few schools, the VA and state authorizing agencies requested legislation, which led to HR 475. This proposal is a discriminatory cap on funds available to veterans enrolled in flight-training degree programs at public colleges and universities, which were the only programs subject to this cap. In its attempt to address the discriminatory nature of the House proposal, the Senate proposal would harm even more veterans, as it fails to address the discriminatory nature of the provision.

Both the House and Senate proposals would cap flight-training degree programs at public institutions at $20,240 a year, or approximately $81,000 for a four-year degree. HAI survey data indicates that the cost of a four-year degree program for an employable commercial helicopter pilot is approximately $212,500. With lower operating costs, fixed-wing tuition costs would be lower.

Rather than discriminating against veterans seeking **flight training** degrees, the aviation associations urged Congress to direct the VA to enforce uniformly its existing 85/15 market force regulations and direct the Government Accountability Office to study the flight training industry and the cost of educating commercial pilots. In closing, association officials said they "look forward to working with the [Veterans Affairs] Committee to find the solution that best serves the needs of both the veteran and the taxpayer."

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