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Thursday, July 12, 2012

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Congresswoman Matsui Fights to Ensure American Army Veterans Receive Promised Education Benefits

Legislation will extend the window of opportunity in which the Army can provide Army College Fund payments

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Doris Matsui (CA-05) today introduced legislation, the Fulfilling Our Promise to Student Veterans Act of 2012, to ensure that America’s veterans receive the full scope of education benefits to which they are entitled. This legislation extends the time in which the Army may retroactively provide Army College Fund (ACF) payments to soldiers who were promised them under the terms of their contract.

“This legislation is designed to ensure the brave men and women who serve our country receive the education benefits they were promised,” said Congresswoman Matsui. “We owe our honored veterans a debt of gratitude, and it is our duty to make sure they receive the best services and support our country has to offer.”

The ACF is an enlistment incentive option designed to aid in the recruitment of highly qualified soldiers for critical or shortage Military Occupational Specialties. The ACF supplements the basic Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB), however unlike the MGIB, individuals are not automatically eligible for the ACF funding. A soldier is required to sign up for the ACF upon enlistment, and it must be included in their initial entry contract for them to receive the funding.

In some cases, however, the Army significantly cut or entirely refused to pay the ACF benefits. In other cases, misleading contract language led soldiers to believe they would be receiving vastly more than they were awarded.

In 2008, Congresswoman Matsui was approached by her constituent, a veteran attending California State University, Sacramento, who did not receive the education money he believed he was owed under the ACF. After investigating the matter further, Congresswoman Matsui introduced an amendment to the FY 2009 Defense Department Authorization Bill that would create an appeals process for soldiers who contested the amount of educational benefits received. The amendment also enabled the Army – on a case by case basis – to pay a soldier going through the appeals process an amount deemed fair and equitable. This amendment became law on October 14, 2008.

“Student veterans at our campus and others sometimes express frustration about receiving their benefits,” said Dr. Lori Varlotta, Vice President for Student Affairs at Sacramento State. “Any veteran benefit—such as an enlistment one like the Army College Fund— is very important to veterans, especially those pursuing college careers, particularly in today’s economy.”

The amendment authored by Congresswoman Matsui in 2008 placed into statute an appeals process for soldiers, ensuring they would have an avenue to petition if they did not receive the funding they were promised. The provision allowing the Army to provide payments to these individuals, however, expired on December 31, 2009.

After hearing from the Student Veterans of America that active duty soldiers – who had the necessary ACF provisions in their contract – did not receive the money owed to them because they were serving overseas and were therefore unable to file by the provision’s expiration date, Congresswoman Matsui immediately moved to rectify the problem, introducing the Fulfilling Our Promise to Student Veterans Act of 2012.

“SVA fully supports Congresswoman Matsui’s bill that would extend the amount of time to file a claim for rightfully earned benefits under the Army College Fund,” said Michael Dakduk, Executive Director of the Students Veterans of America. “Congresswoman Matsui championed similar legislation in 2008, and she is once again stepping up for student veterans.”

“Our honored service members were promised these education benefits when they signed up to serve their country. These benefits help returning soldiers get the education they desire, and, in turn, our communities benefit from their invaluable contributions both in the military and at home,” added Congresswoman Matsui.

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