

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2101

June 28, 2012

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Secretary
Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary
Department of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretaries Panetta, Duncan, and Shinseki,

We write on behalf of the institutions of higher education we represent, and the veterans they serve, regarding Executive Order 13607, Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses and other Family Members ("Principles"). Due to a number of questions and concerns raised by institutions, we urge you to delay the June 30, 2012 deadline for schools to express intent to comply and more fully explain what compliance with the Principles entails. Given the looming deadline, we ask for your expedited response to our request.

We share your desire to provide service members, veterans, and their family members with access to the necessary information to make informed decisions about how they will pursue higher education. As you know, Congress passed several provisions aimed at improving disclosure and transparency in the financial aid process for students during passage of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. That legislation, while still in its infancy in implementation, was the product of years of collaborative work between Congress, students, schools, and veterans and service members, all committed to seeking the appropriate balance between disclosure for those who bravely serve(d) our nation and adequate requirements on higher education for transparency and data reporting.

We understand the challenges facing your agencies as you work to inform the public and implement E.O. 13607. For that reason, we believe the best course of action would have been for President Obama and Congress to work collaboratively to consider stakeholder input on both policy and timing of implementation in order to craft legislation protecting veterans. Regrettably, that path was not chosen and much is still unclear about what the Principles involve and what is expected of schools. Schools and veterans, however, should not face the consequences of Washington-created problems. For that reason, we believe the following coordinated actions should be taken by your agencies:

1. Announce the delay or complete repeal of the June 30, 2012 deadline for institutions to indicate an intent to comply. The Administration has suggested that this deadline is flexible and schools can sign onto the Principles after the deadline. In our view, it would eliminate a great deal of confusion if the deadline were eliminated altogether and focus were placed on disseminating information to schools so they can make decisions regarding compliance on timelines that fit their unique circumstances.
2. Immediately answer outstanding questions posed by the American Council on Education's (ACE) and the National Association of College and University Business Officers' (NACUBO) June 22, 2012 letter asking for further clarification of several principles. As that letter indicates, schools are committed to adhering to the Principles *per se* but need guidance on what will be expected of them over the coming months and years. Asking for compliance before information is available on what compliance entails is unreasonable and unfair to these institutions.
3. Detail subsequent actions or requirements that may be forthcoming to implement E.O. 13607. Administration officials continue to claim that more details and requests could be promulgated to ensure schools are complying with this order. To the extent these actions and requirements go beyond simple coordination amongst federal agencies and create further uncertainty and requirements on schools, we request these be outlined upfront to the fullest extent possible.

Again, we appreciate the intention of Executive Order 13607 in protecting those who protect this nation. In the pursuit of this goal, however, we do not believe schools should be left uncertain about what is expected of them. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee



Michael B. Enzi
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee