

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Federal Advisory Committee
Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education (VACOE)
Meeting Minutes for May 24 - May 25, 2022**

VACOE Members Present:

Mona Dexter, Chair; Chief of Staff | Vice President, Operations & Communications, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation – Hiring Our Heroes
Keith Hauk, Vice Chair; Associate Vice President, Stateside Military Operations, University of Maryland University College (UMGC)
Barry Butler, Ph.D., President, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
Sarah Roberts, Head of Military and Veteran Programs, LinkedIn
Michael Haynie, Ph.D., Vice Chancellor, Syracuse University, Founder and Executive Director, Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families
Soudarak (Sue) Luangkhhot Hoppin, President and Founder, National Military Spouse Network
Jared S. Lyon, President and CEO, Student Veterans of America (SVA)
John T. Quintas, Major General, USAF, (Retired), Managing Director, Military Affairs, Amazon.com
Darrell L. Roberts, Director of Organizing, International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART)
David Salgado, Director, Veterans Education, Texas Veterans Commission
Violet Velazquez, Reservist, U.S. Navy
Cynthia A. Warrick, Ph.D., RPh, President, Stillman College

Also Present:

Joseph Maltby, Management Analyst; Designated Federal Officer
Jill Thomas, Alternate Designated Federal Officer
Denis McDonough, Secretary of VA (presented via recorded video)
Thomas Alphonso, Assistant Director, Policy and Procedures
Mary Glenn, Acting Executive Director, Education Service
Joshua Lashbrook, Assistant Director, Operations Support and Education Service
Ricardo Da Silva, Program Integration Officer, Education Service
Khristina Sly, Analyst, Education Service
Riley Ross, Deputy Director, Education and Veteran Readiness and Employment
Chris Johnston, Deputy Chief Technology Officer, Digital Experience
Melissa Rebstock, VBASPT

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

Welcome and Administrative Announcements

Joseph Maltby, Designated Federal Officer for the Committee, informed the Committee that the previous Chair, Ms. Sarah Roberts, had stepped down but was still a part of the Committee. In her place is the previous Vice Chair, now Chair Mona Dexter, and the new Vice Chair, Colonel Keith Hauk. Mr. Maltby then introduced the new Assistant Designated Federal Officer, Jill Thomas.

Roll Call

Jill Thomas, Assistant Designated Federal Officer for the Committee, called the roll and determined a quorum was present. She then reviewed the rules of engagement.

Opening Remarks – Chair

Mona Dexter, Chair, called the meeting to order and introduced herself. She acknowledged a public comment submitted by Veterans Education Success.

Opening Remarks – Vice Chair

Colonel Keith Hauk, Vice Chair, introduced himself and thanked the Committee for their time and effort.

Secretary Video

Chair Dexter introduced Mr. Denis McDonough, the Secretary of VA. As Mr. McDonough was unable to attend the meeting, a video with prerecorded remarks was played for the committee.

Secretary McDonough expanded on the fundamental principles of advocacy, access, outcomes & excellence. He reminded and reviewed how guidance from committees like this provide lifesaving and life changing results for Veterans through the committees' recommendations to VA.

Committee Member Introductions

Committee members introduced themselves and summarized their experiences with the military and the GI Bill.

Distance Learning Subcommittee Update

Chair Dexter requested Dr. Butler, lead of the distance learning subcommittee, give a review of the subcommittee. She also shared that Dr. Warrick and Member Valezquez are part of the distance learning subcommittee.

Dr. Butler explained that the distance learning subcommittee will be looking on the impact of COVID on distance learning across the entire educational spectrum, looking for answers to questions such as, what is going to be staying with us in education in terms of online distance learning? What is going to drop by the wayside because it was a temporary fix? And what impact will these changes have on distance learning?

Dr. Butler outlined three recommendations the subcommittee will be focusing on finalizing. The first is, how is distance education defined and how does that fit into the whole VA structure for reimbursement? The second recommendation speaks to the 8515 rule in terms of what constitutes too many in a given course or given program. The third recommendation concerns dealing with the housing allowance type of structure in terms of the reimbursement and how it comes down.

Dr. Butler expressed his interest in the subcommittee also finding how well online instructors are doing their job, how they are delivering the instruction, and if they are interacting with the students in a meaningful way. He also noted that quality control and accessibility are two big areas to focus on.

Mr. Maltby noted that, with the short lead time, they tried to cover as many topics as possible related to updates on the Committee's recommendations. He shared an update on the implementation of risk based surveys, as it is on target for implementation on October 1, 2022. He assured the Committee that the next meeting will have the most robust update possible.

Vice Chair Hauk agreed with Dr. Butler on the importance of quality and how to measure it. He suggested the distance education subcommittee take that notion of regular and substantive interaction and tie that as a measure of quality, referring to a document provided to the Committee by DES. Dr. Butler concurred.

Chair Dexter thanked Dr. Butler for the extensive overview. She reviewed the other two subcommittees, with Member Quintas leading the modernization subcommittee with Member Lyon and Member D. Roberts joining him, and Member D. Roberts leading the on the job training apprenticeships subcommittee, with Member Hoppin and Member Salgado joining. Chair Dexter asked if the Committee members had any questions.

Dr. Butler shared how he has never met in person with the Committee before due to COVID, and asked how they would go about bringing professional experts in to speak to the group, as well as where the meetings would be held. Mr. Maltby noted that he also has not coordinated an in-person meeting either, but the fall meeting will be in D.C. as the Committee is also encouraged to do a top 3 leadership visit. He also encouraged the Committee to send him the names of any experts they would like to participate in either subcommittee or full Committee meetings so he can coordinate with the requested expert to attend a meeting.

With no further comments or questions, Chair Dexter called recess until the presentations at 1:00 p.m.

Distance Learning Regulatory Language Review

Chair Dexter welcomed the Committee back from recess and introduced the first presenter, Mr. Thomas Alphonso, Assistant Director for Policy and Procedures. Mr. Alphonso introduced himself and explained the teams that work under him to work on regulations and policies.

Mr. Alphonso informed the Committee of a special team he is working with for the next four months, which is a temporary detail team working on the DGIB (Digital GI Bill) procedures. He explained the team's job is to write the rules that the IT side will implement, including but not limited to what data to process, what elements to take in, the criteria, and how to do the math. He shared that he and his team have been working on updating regulatory language for many years, but that it is a long process and there are other regulatory changes not yet finalized that need to be finished first because they impact the same section of the regulations.

He went on to review the current update for Recommendation 9: Review and Update Regulatory Language (regarding "Distance Learning"). He explained there is a statute that says independent study can only be approved at a very limited group, which is accredited IHLs (institutes of higher learning) or NCD (non-college degree) program. Mr. Alphonso noted that currently, there is a regulation that says to define resident training, and everything else is seen as independent study. As such, distance learning doesn't differentiate whether a student qualifies as resident, which is not the opposite of independent study. He pointed out the counterpoint to resident is distance, and the counterpoint to independent is standard.

Mr. Alphonso continued outlining the plan for the new regulations, which included the following points:

- EDU is in the process of drafting a rule that would amend existing regulatory definitions for "independent study" and "distance learning" as well as define "resident learning" and establish a new term, "standard curriculum," in order to distinguish independent study from standard curriculum and distance learning from resident learning.
- The rule is being drafted to incorporate most of the Department of Education's definition of "distance education" from 20 U.S.C. § 1003(7) but adds an exception for training which would not be considered "distance learning" for VA purposes if the student is required to be in a physical classroom at a designated time to access technology, instructional materials, or the like.

- Additionally, the rule is being drafted to provide a new definition of independent study that bases the classification of “independent study” on the level of autonomy a student enjoys regarding the content of the course’s subject matter while providing for regular substantive interaction with the instructor.
- The plan is for the definition of distance learning to no longer be tied to the definition of independent study.
- The counterpoint to independent study will be standard curriculum; likewise, distance learning will be the counterpoint to resident learning.
- The updated modalities or training align with past commentary from our educational partners.
- The new definitions directly address the concerns raised by the Committee, as well as other stakeholders who made similar comments on a recent proposed rule concerning SAA (State Approving Agency) jurisdiction.

Mr. Alphonso informed the Committee there is no clear timeline for the proposed regulations. However, he shared that the major regulation that has been holding this plan up is on track to be proposed around the end of the year which he expects to be finalized around May 2023. He also shared they have a proposed rule that came out a few months ago for SAA jurisdiction, which was attempting to define which SAA has jurisdiction for online training, which is not currently well defined in the regulations. This proposed rule gained many public comments which suggested they also change the regulations on independent study while they are working on distance learning. Having finished his presentation, Mr. Alphonso opened the floor for questions.

Dr. Warrick asked if only staff is involved in the process Mr. Alphonso outlined, or if they also have individuals like students or institutions weighing in. Mr. Alphonso responded that while students aren't involved, institutions are. They had a series of meeting with schools, and has some of the National Association of State Approving Agencies working with them.

Dr. Butler shared he felt that the part of Mr. Alphonso’s presentation involving the level of autonomy a student enjoys regarding the content of the course while providing for regular substantive interaction. He asked if Mr. Alphonso’s team would have any public documents before fall of 2023 that his distance learning subcommittee would be able to review. Mr. Alphonso assured Dr. Butler the language would be shared, but he was unsure when it would be ready. However, he would ensure that as soon as his team are ready to share the language, it will be sent straight to the Committee.

Member Salgado asked if the regulation being changed is 21.4267. Mr. Alphonso confirmed that is the regulation they are working on changing.

Member Lyon queried if there is any effort to support parity and MHA pay for online students. Mr. Alphonso could not speak to his question, but noted it would have to be a statutory change with a legislative proposal. Mr. Alphonso also shared that there are statistics that show during COVID with the move to online learning, there was positive correlation between getting more housing pay and staying in school.

Mr. Maltby noted the current legislative authorization as far as the timeline for how the Committee's work intersects with Mr. Alphonso's work expires December of 2022. However, it has been re-authorized for 50 years so he expects it will be re-authorized again. He further shared the Committee is chartered and its member terms go to 2024, so even if it's not timely by default, there should be a future time where a subcommittee or full committee could further the above discussion. Mr. Maltby pointed out the VA's official response to a recommendation regarding MHA equalization via a legislative proposal is that they do not comment on pending or potential legislative proposals but will take the Committee's interest and feedback in mind in the future.

With no further questions for Mr. Alphonso, Chair Dexter thanked him for his time and preparations for the presentation to the Committee.

VA Interagency Partnerships Update

Chair Dexter welcomed Ms. Barbara Wilson, the chief of the Transition Assistance Program curriculum and governance, and invited her to begin her presentation regarding interagency partnerships.

Ms. Wilson introduced herself and explained that OTED is the Outreach, Transition, and Economic Development office under Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). OTED's major role is to provide support to transitioning service members, their families, caregivers, and those that support the service members as they transition out of the military. Their office also has a post-separation division, as well as strategic engagement and TAP. She continued, explaining how TAP is an interagency program established in July 2018 to provide transitioning service members and Veterans with opportunities to achieve economic success and total well-being as they move from military service to civilian life or to Veteran status.

Ms. Wilson described the various interagency partner OTED works with, including the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, Department of Education, Homeland Security, Small Business Administration, OPM, and others. She shared the governance structure, which is comprised of the Joint Executive Committee (JEC), the Transition Assistance Executive Council (TAP-EC), and the Senior Steering Group (SSG). Under and reporting to the above mentioned entities is the Transition Assistance Interagency Working Group, with some co-working groups under them including the employment working group, the performance management working group, the curriculum working

group, data sharing working group, and strategic communications working group. She explained the jobs of each co-working group:

- The employment working group develops, coordinates, and synchronizes all actions OTEP is working towards in order to make sure those transitioning from the military will have gainful employment and access to education and other resources.
- The performance management working group develops, implements, and monitors the interagency TAP evaluation strategy to assess and improve the effectiveness of TAP.
- The curriculum working group makes sure there's no redundancy as far as the different types of courses and classes that service members have to go through that are mandatory, that all their information is accurate, and that there is consistency across the board.
- The data sharing working group is responsible for making sure all data is collected when it comes to enrollment in any of the programs, using an assessment tool that is administered to participants. The data feeds into all other working groups and informs how they make changes and improvements to the program.
- The strategic communications working group's major role is to make sure that they are marketing and promoting all of the activities that are going on in the transition space, making sure they're working with their partners so they can push out information further and quicker to those who need it most, who are the transitioning service members and their families.

Before continuing to the next slide and topic, Ms. Wilson opened the floor for questions. Mr. Maltby asked if the communication Ms. Wilson's team has is fairly germane to TAP specifically and transition, or if there are other collaboration interagency happening relative to the work. Ms. Wilson responded that the Joint Executive Committee covers more the TAP, so they monitor a lot of activities, transition being only one of many. Mr. Maltby thanked Ms. Wilson and with no other questions, Ms. Wilson continued with her presentation.

Ms. Wilson went on to explain how data sharing is one of the advantages of the interagency working groups and one of their strongest processes they have going as it encourages connectivity which is a highly effective way to share relevant information about best practices not only with the people in the governance structure but also all stakeholders, internally and externally. This creates more effective change and constant exchange of information. Ms. Wilson's group also looks at continuous evaluation of program improvement, which they would be unable to do if they didn't have access to the data to inform the changes and improvements across the TAP

space. Finished with her slide on data sharing, Ms. Wilson asked the Committee if there were any questions.

Member Hoppin queried how transitioning service members get information about other programs that are available to them, if that is a component of TAP or a resource component, since other sessions like at DOL aren't mandatory. Ms. Wilson first addressed the DOL statement, noting that there are some components of DOL training that are mandatory. For those that are not mandatory, the service member has to prove they don't need to take the non-mandatory training by showing they already have a plan in place for that component, which then needs to be signed off by their transition counselor for approval to skip a particular course.

Ms. Wilson then addressed the second part of Member Hoppin's question about how information is sent out to those who need it. She shared that the strategic working group's role is to make sure they are pushing information out as far and wide as they can, and using all platforms available to make sure that this information is going to the right place. Member Hoppin thanked Ms. Wilson for her response and had no further questions.

Ms. Wilson continued her presentation, the next topic being proactive partner collaboration. She shared how the other proactive partnership they have with their partners and stakeholders is quality assurance site visits done by the VA which helps them to provide oversight of the program in coordination with their end to date with their interagency partners. Her conducts the site visits to ensure provisions of services to TAP and partners are consistent with applicable laws, making sure the policies and other directives they have all agreed to in the interagency partnership are being done in the field.

Ms. Wilson then explained the two types of site visits conducted:

- Command Site Visit (Executive Director, Deputy & Assistant Director): Primary focus is to assess the overall climate of the transition program, ensure command-wide awareness, and that the installation commander's objectives are being met.
- Quality Control & Site Visit Readiness Assessment (OPS Chief/Program Analyst): Primary focus is to ensure VA's Benefits Advisors have required materials and facilities needed to conduct a class, as wells as to provide proper support and service delivery to service members.

Having finished with her presentation, Ms. Wilson asked the Committee if they had any questions. Vice Chair Hauk asked what feedback mechanisms they have in place as far as engaging with and getting feedback from the service members and family members who go through the programs. Ms. Wilson explained they have something called a Transition Assessment Document, which is administered to every service

member that attends their VA TAP day. The data from that assessment is what DoD pushes over to her team, where they do an analysis of the data which is reviewed to find trends on what service members are saying needs to be improved. She noted this information is pushed to them on a 90 day basis from DoD, when they immediately do their own analysis and reporting and make informed decisions from the data set.

Member Lyon asked if the Veterans Experience Office was integrated with Ms. Wilson's office. Ms. Wilson shared that the Veterans Experience Office is separate from OTED, but they do collaborate and coordinate very closely. She noted how the VEO are doing a human centered design study on TAP with OTED working closely with them.

With no further questions, Ms. Wilson thanked the Committee for their time. Chair Dexter thanked Barbara for her presentation.

Digital GI Bill Update

Chair Dexter welcomed Joshua Lashbrook, assistant director for Operations Support and Education Service and education service lead for the Digital GI Bill (DGIB) program. Mr. Lashbrook greeted the Committee and introduced himself. He then gave an overview of what DGIB is. He explained that through a Managed Service program, Digital GI Bill will eventually combine the functionality of multiple legacy systems, bringing activities like payments, enrollments, and oversight together under one roof. On the back end, he noted, this is going to increase efficiencies, reduce downtime, and allow VA to seamlessly implement legislative changes, giving the VA staff and stakeholders more time to focus on serving Veterans.

Mr. Lashbrook described how on the front end, Managed Service is going to improve Veterans' user experience, allowing beneficiaries to receive information quicker, to better understand and interact with their benefits, and achieve their vocational and career goals at their own pace. This allows Veterans to manager their own experience, access their information, and be in control of their benefits on their time.

Mr. Lashbrook gave a brief update to the Committee on his team's progress to date. He shared the key milestones since starting the program, explaining how EDU is working to fundamentally transform the way education benefits are delivered by improving automation and enabling EDU to better serve Veterans, service members, and their families. He then began to review the key milestones the Digital GI Bill team has met in migrating capabilities over to the Managed Service, including:

- Successfully deployed release 4.0, which improves supplemental claims processing and improve VET TEC claims processing by migrating the VET TEC services into the Managed Service, which allows for agile decision making in a single match platform that grows with their needs.

- The most recent release and future releases contributes to the Managed Service and automation approach that's going to allow beneficiaries access to benefits more easily while also supporting school certifying officials and Veterans claims examiner's activities with faster coordination and streamlined processes.

Mr. Lashbrook then moved on to the next topic, Education Service's efforts with regards to two of the Committee's previous recommendations. He explained how the GI Bill project has made significant progress to eliminate manual processes and adapt agile program management principles, and it is their program primarily delivery goal to eliminate manual processes where possible by improving automation within the Managed Service. Mr. Lashbrook shared that they have seen a 23% increase in Chapter 33 supplemental claims automation since March 2019.

He outlined examples of how EDU has specifically reduced manual intervention, including improving automation of enrollments, letter creation, release of letters, and reducing manual adjudication for exhausted entitlements. He also explained how the team is using the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) project management approach and continue to work iteratively and incrementally to prioritize their work and to program increments. The team delivers project requirements through 28 agile teams across three agile release dates, and to date, they've held six PI planning sessions through which they defined their work priorities and dependencies.

Mr. Lashbrook continued, explaining that to eliminate manual processes, the integrated DGIB program team will continue to focus on automation in-line with their overall program objectives. He shared how, thus far, the team has improved claimant letters, identified and reduced inefficiencies, updated how they track changes in school program and training, and also streamlined the processes for identifying those claimants who need additional adjudication.

The team is also improving automation across the enterprise through the enrollment verification process, successfully implementing the enrollment verification legislative requirement for gib students, and work to automate the process by offering students the option to opt in to a text message and e-mail verification which allows the students to verify their enrollment to receive quick confirmation responses in the channel of their choice. Mr. Lashbrook shared that the opt in rate for this approach is at 98%, showing that automating the enrollment verification process proved integral to a smooth implementation of section 1010 of Isaacs and Rowe, and furthermore allows EDU to focus on serving Veterans, service members, and their families, vice having to do enrollment verification.

Mr. Lashbrook explained how DGIB modernization takes a human-centered design (HCD) approach, putting the end users at the center of new experiences and allowing user feedback to guide problem solving and platform development process. He listed the three main stakeholder groups that drive their modernization efforts: nearly 1 million Veterans and their families, 40,000 school certified officials, and roughly 1,200 VA employees. He noted how full iterations of the My Education Benefits microservice will include an inbox, online enrollment verifications, and comparison of the benefits. For the school certifying officials, the HCD team gathers feedback from 147 SCOs, which includes the initial research phase, survey response, and GI Bill Summit usability testing session.

Mr. Lashbrook continued on to explain how from the last user research group, the HCD team gathered insights from 40 VA employees and stakeholders which includes the initial research phase with Veterans Claims Examiners (VCE), as well as chatbot subject matter experts. The benefits manager will allow VA staff to process all benefits chapters in one centralized claims processing system, and will have pre-populated data to help reduce manual data entry and improve accuracy and efficiency.

Lastly, Mr. Lashbrook shared data on the first ever GI Bill Summit hosted by VBA EDU leadership to answer student education benefits questions they had submitted. The data is as follows:

- Over 250 GI Bill questions were received on the RallyPoint page.
- 6,600 stakeholders RSVPed to the summit, leading to the summit video being the most popular video on the Post-9/11 GI Bill Facebook page with over 6,000 views and over 1,000 comments.
- The event led to a 10% increase in traffic to VA.gov web pages, a 7.7% increase in the form 1990 submissions, and an 82% increase in web traffic from Facebook on the day of the event.
- An enrollment manager usability session with over SCOs was hosted by the team.
- They received feedback that was overwhelmingly positive for the new features and functionality.

Mr. Lashbrook concluded his brief by stating they look forward to continue efforts to connect directly with Veterans and families to receive feedback and continue to improve the overall GI Bill experience. He then opened the floor to comments from the Committee.

Vice Chair Hauk thanked Mr. Lashbrook for his team's hard work on enrollment verification, sharing that it has made life at the institutional level easier. He

expressed his appreciation for the hard work the team has put in to making all of the successes it has seen since going live for the IHLs in January. Mr. Lashbrook thanked him for the comments and promised to pass them along to his team.

Dr. Butler asked Mr. Lashbrook to comment on the security aspect of developing new information flow between different systems. Mr. Lashbrook shared he was one of the PMs on this project, and they have an IT PM as well who will be briefing the Committee in the following day's meeting. As such, Mr. Lashbrook felt the IT PM would be better suited to answer Dr. Butler's question.

With no further questions, Chair Dexter thanked Mr. Lashbrook for his review and comments on progress that has been made and will continue to be made. Mr. Lashbrook thanked the Committee for the opportunity to keep them updated.

Modernization Subcommittee Update

Chair Dexter noted the meeting is well ahead of schedule and so there was time before the next presentation for another subcommittee review and discussion. She requested Member Quintas, lead for the modernization subcommittee, to give the Committee an overview for modernization.

Member Quintas began by giving an overview, offering that he thinks one of the more important elements of moving forward in delivering this benefit to Veterans being digitally modern. He shared that one of the challenges for his team is how much is going on in the modernization space, and how it is moving very quickly quarter by quarter. He felt that part of their role moving forward would be to receive an audit on where VA is on a number of the things, which is how they worded a lot of their recommendations.

Before sharing his subcommittee's six recommendations, Member Quintas asked if the modernization subcommittee is one that should continue, as he is unsure if there are other areas that could warrant their attention. Chair Dexter agreed that it would be worth a conversation in the future, but to continue with his recommendation review for the current meeting. Mr. Maltby shared that the only requirement for subcommittee is that they send a notification memo to the Secretary about what subcommittees will function over the next year.

Member Quintas shared the modernization subcommittee's six recommendations, which are as follows:

1. Eliminate manual processes. Some VA members expressed frustration at having to continue to manage manual processes and how it was impacting them

and their work. VA concurred on principle and will provide an update in Q3 2022.

2. Protect IT funding. It was not an uncommon practice that education benefits would sometimes lose budget to health benefits, so the subcommittee requested to do an analysis on funding. They were told they would be given more information in Q3 2022.
3. Compatibility of IT systems and a single high quality mobile friendly service tool. Services are moving away from a web-based platform more into an application tool. Subcommittee will receive an update later in 2022.
4. Interagency collaboration and if they are specifically reviewing IT modernization of education benefits. VA concurred in principle and promised an update.
5. Concept of common experience as one enters into the sphere of the VA and using the education gateway as the main gateway. VA considered this in their response and promised an update.
6. Adoption of Agile Program Management. Subcommittee requested concrete evidence that Agile tools were being fully trained and utilized. Subcommittee was shown the exact program the VA is using via the VA response.

Member Quintas indicated he was finished with reviewing their six recommendations and welcomed feedback from the Committee.

Member Hoppin asked the Committee in general if there is a way for them to monitor progress of recommendations such as a shared document that is color coded for each type of VA response. Member Lyon suggested Mr. Maltby may have a way to ensure the Committee receives updates, but deferred to Chair Dexter and Vice Chair Hauk. Member Hoppin further suggested there be a repository of information for new Committee members on recent past recommendations and VA responses so they can be built upon and know whether or not to continue pursuing a specific recommendation. Member Lyon concurred that there should be a way to capture institutional knowledge in a non-textual way for new and future Committee members.

Chair Dexter thanked Sue for her suggestions and agreed it would be helpful to make sure the work is continuing to move forward, as well as utilizing some sort of visual tool. Vice Chair Hauk concurred and questioned Mr. Maltby what capabilities exist in terms of the Committee's ability to collaborate on a single document regarding recommendations.

Member Velazquez queried if the verbiage in the GI Bill is also being modernized, using an example of her personal experience as a Reservist not being able to utilize the GI Bill with 100% efficiency. Mr. Maltby noted how the scope of the Committee includes proposals around changing legislative language, and one was a similar recommendation put forth in 2021 that VA's response was they appreciated the input

and would consider it when doing future legislative work, but they are unable to comment on anything they are specifically working on. He noted the topic is worth keeping in mind, but they may only receive the same response to any recommendation regarding legislative language.

Member Quintas gave his support for Member Velazquez's suggestion, noting it would be worth spending time to explore whether or not current language or current thinking around the Forever GI Bill is fully able to address where Veterans and their children and what their experience is headed, or is at. He asked Member Velazquez if her suggestion was dealing with the question of if the language in the law is addressing the modern experience of those using it.

Member Velazquez shared an example of "combat" being used often in legislation, where the 21st century individual are mostly not in combat situations or have combat orders. She gave her personal experience of being 11 years in the Reserves as an intelligence specialist, but she does not qualify for anything in the legislation that has combat based terminology.

Mr. Maltby reminded the Committee that they have heard updates from the Veterans Experience Office, and there is a large scale customer experience effort across VBA and VA, and within Education Service. He suggested they view the verbiage modernization in the lens of, is VA in every way building a GI Bill for the future?

Mr. Maltby addressed the suggestions for tracking current or past recommendations, saying he and Jill could come up with a tracker that is more visual to help people keep track of where the recommendations are. He noted the possible disconnect between VA seeing itself as having accommodated and answered the recommendations versus what the Committee was expecting, so he suggested using this information to reiterate and come at the recommendation from a different angle.

Mr. Maltby informed the Committee of the inability to use Google Docs and sharing due to those types of collaboration tools being outside of the VA's firewall, making it impossible for him to utilize. Therefore, they will have to use e-mail for the time being, but he suggested the possibility of making a password. He also reminded the Committee that the subcommittees make factual findings and draft recommendations, but the Committee itself makes the recommendations.

Dr. Butler expressed his support of the general concept of modernizing verbiage. Member Lyon added his appreciation of Member Velazquez's suggestion. He agreed that the wording of legislation needs to match not only current needs but anticipate future needs as well. He also told Member Velazquez that there is a piece of legislation called the Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parody Act of 2021 moving through Congress and currently with the Senate that she may want to review. Member D. Roberts also agreed

that something to help onboard future Committee members would be helpful to share continuity of information.

Mr. Maltby noted the acting executive director for Education Service, Mary Glenn, had joined the call. Chair Dexter welcomed Ms. Glenn and invited her to speak.

Acting EDU Director Remarks

Ms. Glenn introduced herself and began by assuring the Committee that, despite current leadership changes in EDU, the team is still together and moving seamlessly toward making sure their mission is successful. She shared that the Committee's report of recommendations were approved by the Secretary, and that many of the recommendations made were concurred on by VA. Ms. Glenn commended the Committee on their time and effort to produce the recommendations. She thanked them for the feedback they have given as EDU goes through modernization efforts, as well as the combination of perspectives the Committee has provided.

Ms. Glenn pointed out the 70th anniversary of the GI Bill occurring in June 2022 and told the Committee they are in a great position to help the VA see how they can continue to improve and look forward, as well as what to look like in the future. She thanked the Committee members for agreeing to serve on the advisory committee and expressed looking forward to working with them as they continue moving forward with the Education Service mission. She opened the floor for questions, and with none, thanked the Committee and took her leave.

Chair Dexter suggested a brief recess before beginning the next level of discussion, which the Committee concurred on.

Digital Engagement Review

After the break, Mr. Maltby shared that he was able to get their briefing on digital engagements earlier than scheduled and introduced Ricardo Da Silva and Khristina Sly to speak on behalf of EDU.

Mr. Da Silva introduced himself as the program integration officer for Education Service, with teams that oversee both the communications and strategic initiatives that support delivery of GI Bill benefits. He noted that the Committee would be hearing from one of the teams, digital engagement, which is a relatively new function within Education Service. He then introduced Khristina Sly, an analyst in the digital engagement team, who would be giving the briefing on digital engagements. He also shared that Ms. Sly has experience on the technical side of the GI Bill with claims processing and IT pieces. He then turned the floor over to Ms. Sly for the briefing.

Ms. Sly introduced herself and began the briefing with what she called the first quadrant, expanded brand awareness. She explained that they have worked to promote the Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) using paid social media as well as organic content which included static advertisements, videos, motion display ads, radio ads, T.V. commercials, as well as radio and commercials broadcast to VA medical centers. She shared how her team has done a brand revitalization which included branded color palette logos and an icon library in order to help promote recognition of their content as well as shareability no matter what platform it is viewed on.

Ms. Sly moved on to the second quadrant of her presentation, content volume. She reviewed the team's change in how frequently they posted on social media platforms such as Facebook. She shared how the frequency went from once a week to nearly every day at the start of fiscal year 2022, which gives them the ability to further engage with their audience, supporting that feeling of a trusted and prominent resource of information.

She reviewed the third quadrant, beneficiary interaction. She shared how in March of 2022, they spent a week collecting over 2015 questions from Veterans, service members, and their families via RallyPoint, a digital platform allowing the military committee to come together both socially and professionally. Her team then used those questions to create a 24 minute prerecorded video which was premiered to the Education Service Facebook page on April 14 as the 2022 GI Bill Summit which was well received by the community. Ms. Sly also noted that at the same time the summit was happening, they had an enrollment manager feedback session with over 600 school certifying officials to discuss feedback of the prototype for the Enrollment Manager, currently known as VA-ONCE, which is also part of their modernization efforts.

Ms. Sly moved on to the last quadrant, diversifying content type. She stated that diversifying the diversity of the content they provide allows them to reach audiences of all ages in a variety of ways, not only through the platform, but the content itself. In order to achieve this, they post a variety of content types including minimal text, video with images only, or text heavy infographics. She also shared that they are in the planning stages of a fall summit planned for September 2022 which will allow leadership to further engage with students and provide the team the opportunity to not only answer questions from students but also highlight newly released modernization efforts. Having concluded her briefing, she opened the floor for questions.

Member Lyon thanked Ms. Sly for the presentation and asked if digital engagement is also complemented by things like coordinated e-mail campaign and other forms of digital direct outreach versus broadcasting. Ms. Sly shared how they use GovDelivery

as a method to send targeted and general e-mail messaging to students and other stakeholders, as well as using a variety of platforms by cross-posting not only to their own Facebook account, but also Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Member Lyon requested clarification about GovDelivery.

Mr. Da Silva explained GovDelivery as their mass e-mail platform which allows them to send an e-mail blast to a large amount or small amount of people depending on their needs. He shared how GovDelivery had helped them send out targeted e-mail campaigns to students and schools about how some COVID provisions were coming to an end on June 1 so those affected would know in advance. In addition, they put the same information on Facebook and VBA Twitter so there are multiple ways the information could reach the intended audience. Mr. Da Silva also expressed the intention to do more traditional in person outreach in the future at conferences, one on one meetings, and student round tables.

Mr. Maltby noted another form of targeted e-mail communication that is done is a recurring e-mail campaign where they can identify GI Bill students, and particularly Post-9/11 GI Bill students, who are at various stages in their journey through their use of their benefits. He shared how they have various types of messages they send out depending on if a person is first starting to use their benefits, are at 50% through their entitlement, and 80% through their entitlement, in addition to others. The 80% targeted message is especially focused on GI Bill supplemental benefits, job search resources, career planning, and so forth. Mr. Maltby reviewed how one area they are looking to expand is to increase utilization of benefits, and they have developed the ability to identify students who are coming up on their benefits exhaustion date in a year and give them information a year out to remind them to use the benefits before they expire if they intend to do so.

Member Lyon asked Mr. Maltby if one of the goals of Education Service is to increase benefits utilization. Mr. Maltby replied that Mr. Da Silva may be better equipped to answer his question, but that Education Service does have specific efforts focused on GI Bill utilization with particular populations such as people who might lose their benefits or who seem to have demonstrated interest in their benefits and not followed through.

Mr. Da Silva responded that he was unsure if it is a stated goal to increase benefits utilization. However, he noted two of the Secretary's overarching principles are access and outcomes. One way he feels they can support those principles is to make sure those who are eligible for the GI Bill, apply and use it. He viewed this as an opportunity for the Committee to work with OTED to get the word out to beneficiaries and use it as a call to action.

Member Lyon thanked Mr. Da Silva and Mr. Maltby for the information. He went on to ask what some of the metrics surrounding utilization of the benefit are, if there is a specific stated goal or metric that drives increased utilization of benefits. Mr. Da Silva responded that there is not a set target for metrics. He shared that Accenture did a report recently that does speak to Member Lyon's questions about metrics. Mr. Da Silva affirmed that they do want every Veteran to use the services and benefits available to them, but they have not yet tied that to anything internally at that time.

Member Lyon suggested the topic could be worth considering having a presentation on, as well as how the Committee might consider a recommendation in the future that could surround GI Bill utilization rates as a metric. Mr. Da Silva volunteered to set a presentation for that up for the next meeting if it is something the Committee is interested in.

Dr. Warrick requested demographic data specifically on racial and ethnic distribution on the report. She recalled a previous Committee discussion regarding the lower percentages of ethnic minorities participating in the GI bill, prompting her to request exact data. Mr. Maltby told Dr. Warrick the Accenture report referenced by Mr. Da Silva earlier has been sent to the Committee via e-mail to review. He also affirmed he would add to the list a subcommittee or Committee briefing to hear from Accenture about their research.

Mr. Maltby shared a project ongoing that he hopes the Committee will be able to hear from in the fall meetings, which is a VBA research project on benefits utilization and how often beneficiaries who use one benefit utilize others. He also noted there is a connection between analysis and modernization work, as the systems modernization allows access of more data which in turn allows for more analysis and targeted communication.

Member Quintas expressed his interest in the utilization piece, particularly around diversity. He noted noticing a connection between utilization and outcomes, and asked how outcomes are defined, what the Secretary means by outcomes when they establish it as a priority. Mr. Da Silva said he would have the published strategic plan sent to the Committee to help answer that question, but that he does think the Secretary is looking for Veterans to come in the door, use their benefit, use the service at VA, and have a positive experience in how they view their interaction with VA. He also shared that they are looking at doing a better job of explaining, identifying, and defining success and return on investment for the GI Bill. Mr. Da Silva suggested the Committee get a presentation from the team working on the aforementioned process.

With no further questions, Chair Dexter thanked Mr. Da Silva for his presentation and Mr. Da Silva thanked the Committee for their time.

On the Job Training and Apprenticeships Subcommittee Update

As Member Darrell Roberts, lead of the OTJ Training and Apprenticeships subcommittee, was no longer in attendance for the meeting, Chair Dexter asked Member Hoppin to give an overview of that subcommittee's work, finding, and recommendations, as Member Hoppin had been a member of the subcommittee in the previous year.

Member Hoppin obliged and began the overview by acknowledging her fellow subcommittee members. She commended Member D. Roberts for his extensive knowledge of on the job training and apprenticeships, as well as the support and work that he offered to the committee with his experience. She also thanked a previous Committee member, Ashlynn Haycock, who brought the perspective of survivors and caregivers to the way the subcommittee viewed the topic and helped to govern how the subcommittee approached the solutions offered in their recommendations.

Member Hoppin shared how the subcommittee thought of military spouses and caregivers not just as beneficiaries but also as partners in achieving VA's goal of getting Veterans into the door of VA to begin receiving benefits. The subcommittee identified gaps in knowledge around on the job training and apprenticeships were around the military spouse community, and suggested the VA could be a value added if partnering with DoD, who was struggling with 24 to 48% military spouse unemployment rates. Member Hoppin also pointed out that many VA spouses may not know about programs available to them while their spouse is still active duty, not only once they retire from the military.

She explained the subcommittee's recommendation on a military spouse lifecycle experience map to make sure military spouses understood what benefits they had at what stage of their service member's career. Member Hoppin also shared that the other recommendation made was about making sure 100% of the resources were available to 100% of the beneficiaries, not to leave that information until the Veteran is in transition when the spouse is often bombarded with information that could have been given to the spouse earlier.

Member Hoppin finished outlining the recommendations and directed a question towards Mr. Maltby and Chair Mona regarding what exactly VA means when they respond that they concur in principle to certain recommendations. Mr. Maltby shared that the way he read the response provided by the Office of Transition and Economic Development was, they think it's a good idea but don't have the power to implement it

absent policy changes on the part of the DoD. He explained the DoD is outside the scope of what the Committee focuses on, where it says that military spouses are not required to provide their information to VA and VA is not authorized to request it. He suggested this could be an area of clarification for a future briefing.

Member Hoppin asked if that basically means that VA agrees with their recommendation, but that it's out of VA's scope. Mr. Maltby answered that that was how he understood it, but that he would need to get clarification to be sure. Member Hoppin responded that she would defer to Chair Dexter or Vice Chair Hauk on if further clarification is needed via briefing for the Committee. She shared that she stood by the recommendation and felt it is important to measure the success they have in getting more Veterans through the door through getting more military spouses and caregivers engaged.

Chair Dexter agreed on getting some follow up as far as clarification of concur versus concur in principle, and then the specific responses. She suggested that as the Committee maps out the tracking of the recommendations from 2021 and the responses they provided and briefings, they could decide if a recommendation needed to be revisited or reframed in a different way, in addition to possibly rethinking what some of the subcommittee structures are. She opened the floor to questions from the Committee on anything they had discussed thus far.

Committee Discussion

Vice Chair Hauk concurred with Member Hoppin and shared that the term "mandate" is interesting to him in terms of establishing measures in absence of a mandate. He suggested it would be helpful to understand from their perspective if a mandate is something legislative in nature or if it is something that could be accomplished from a policy or regulatory framework. Mr. Maltby assured the Committee he would seek clarity, whether through a written response or a subcommittee briefing.

Dr. Haynie shared that he found the discussion about modernization as it relates to policy very compelling, as the pace of change happening in higher education at that moment is more than anybody had seen in the last 70 years. He asked, what is the bridge to higher education with regard to these conversations about the future of the GI Bill, both from the perspective from the Committee and also the VA? He agreed that VA has to be at the table in context of how higher education is changing and accelerating in terms of change stemming from COVID.

Member Lyon concurred on the need to reconsider what the future of the GI Bill should look like. He also brought up the recent ethics training the Committee had done as part of their yearly training, and how he had re-read the charter and noticed the Assistance Secretary of Education for Post-Secondary Education as well as the Assistant Secretary

of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training are meant to be ex officio members of the Committee. Member Lyon asked Mr. Maltby if those officials had been invited but declined, or had not been invited to meetings as of yet. He suggested that having the Department of Education and Department of Labor as active participants in the Committee could be instrumental.

Mr. Maltby shared that they had not yet been invited, but that he would check with the Advisory Committee Management Office on how best to go about inviting them. Member Hoppin pointed out that the new Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training is James Rodriguez, who many of the Committee members knew personally. She suggested that, as he is new to the position, it would be a great time to invite him to the Committee meetings. Mr. Maltby assured them he would get more information and circle back.

Chair Dexter asked if the Committee had any other general comments and questions before they end the day's conference. She reviewed the next day's agenda, noting there are two presentations scheduled, and then the Committee would continue the day's discussion topics with the goal to ensure understanding of the information, background on 2021 recommendations, and other information for new members. She suggested they could point to what may be continuation of the current subcommittees based on the day's briefings and information taken in. Chair Dexter then proposed they close the day's meeting, as they would have time between speakers the next day for further discussion.

Vice Chair Hawk seconded the motion to adjourn, adding that he felt they had a great discussion today but should come to a closure by the end of the next day's meeting around what they want the subcommittee structures to look like so Mr. Maltby has the information he needs to begin scheduling meetings to support the Committee going forward. Chair Dexter concurred and mentioned she would work on a spreadsheet for the 2021 recommendations in the time between meetings. Member Hoppin volunteered to do the spreadsheet, as it was her idea to begin with, and Chair Dexter agreed and thanked her. Dr. Butler thanked Chair Dexter and Vice Chair Hawk for a great meeting.

Adjourn

Chair Dexter and Vice Chair Hawk thanked the Committee members. There being no further business, Chair Dexter adjourned the meeting at 3:56 p.m. EST.

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

Roll Call

Ms. Thomas called the roll and determined that a quorum was present.

Welcome and Rules of Engagement

Ms. Thomas welcomed the Committee members, VA staff, and guests back for the second day of the meeting. She reviewed the rules of engagement.

Mr. Maltby reminded the Committee they had 30 minutes until the first speaker will present their briefing to have an open discussion.

Opening Remarks - Chair

Chair Dexter first thanked Ms. Thomas for joining the meeting on her birthday. She then opened the meeting and welcomed everybody back. She thanked the Committee for their time in the previous day's meeting and noted they will be going back and forth on the agenda for the current meeting and thanked them for their flexibility.

Open Discussion

Chair Dexter began by thanking Member Hoppin for creating a tracker spreadsheet in the interim between meetings and requested Member Hoppin share the tracker so the Committee could review it together. Member Hoppin asked Mr. Maltby if he was able to share the tracker on the screen.

While bringing up the tracker, Mr. Maltby informed the Committee that a lot of the dates they originally said would be briefings happening in that day's meeting had been pushed to the fall meeting. He said they would still cover the issues in that day's meeting, they just would not have a briefing on them.

Member Hoppin explained to the Committee that she added on to a 2019 recommendation spreadsheet with a new sheet so they could capture the institutional knowledge from previous years in one place. She showed how she had color coded the tracker to help simplify it, with green meaning the VA had concurred with their recommendation, yellow meaning VA concurred in principle, and red doesn't necessarily mean VA didn't concur, only that VA was unable to provide specific comment as legislative action would have to be taken. She also shared how she noticed some natural takeaways that generated more activity later on, such as where VA said they would give them an update no later than Q3 of fiscal year 2022, they have already began scheduling those briefings for the fall meetings.

Member Hoppin expressed her aspiration that the tracker would help Chair Dexter, Vice Chair Hauk, and Mr. Maltby in developing the Committee's agenda going forward. She noted Chair Dexter and Mr. Maltby's suggestion to add a column for the subcommittees that had purview over each of the recommendations to provide context. Member Hoppin also suggested they hyperlink the original text of the recommendations in their totality to be reviewed outside of the tracker as well.

Chair Dexter thanked Member Hoppin for organizing the information in the spreadsheet tracker for them. She suggested the Committee review the tracker to discuss their intent on how to use it going forward in that day's meeting. She noted that a theme she saw while reviewing the tracker was with recommendations 11 and 12 being more thematic for focusing in improvements for extended beneficiaries versus OTJ and apprenticeships. She also suggested they establish what the three subcommittees are going forward so they can begin their fact finding and planning. She shared how she was getting more messaging focused on digging deeper as to how the Committee is reaching extended beneficiaries as opposed to what specifically is regarding OTJ and apprenticeships. She opened the floor for discussion.

Mr. Maltby offered to share what he had already listed as what he was going to line up for the fall meeting based on their discussions so far. He noted that for recommendation 1, they are going to continue to do briefings on Digital GI Bill and modernization and hear about automation efforts through that. For recommendation 2, he shared they have a briefing that day which will talk about the history of IT program funding in addition to a briefing on an implementation of an executive order that covers some of the Single Sign-On capabilities. He expects another update in the fall on those topics.

Mr. Maltby continued to recommendation 4, which he was unsure if they have anything in mind for the fall meeting for as of yet since they discussed the interagency collaboration the day prior with OTED. He also felt that VA's response on recommendation 5 was similar in the sense that it was saying that the Digital GI Bill and VA.gov efforts are seen by VA as accomplishing the goal the Committee was recommending, so it was wrapped up.

He shared that recommendation 6 would also be covered in the Digital GI Bill updates they'll continue to have for Committee meetings and potentially subcommittee meetings as well. Recommendation 7 will have an update in the fall meeting. He noted that recommendation 8 had already been discussed, and recommendation 9 had an update from Tom Alphonso the previous day but that another update could be scheduled for the fall meeting. He shared he would be looking onto who he could bring in to discuss recommendation 10. He suggested it could benefit the Committee to hear from relevant Family Survivors and Caregivers Advisory Committee as well as the Program

Management Office and Veterans Experience Office. Mr. Maltby was unsure on recommendation 11 since more discussion needed to happen on continued pursuit, but for recommendation 12 he was going to try to track down an answer about where the lack of authorization comes from.

Dr. Butler suggested the Committee continue the distance learning subcommittee, as there is still a lot of work to do in the future in that field and it is a unique part of a large portion of Veteran's educational activities. Vice Chair Hauk concurred and thanked Mr. Quintas for sharing the Q&A from the April session online because, once reviewing it, he realized a set of the comments and questions dealt with this specific issue of modernization. He recalled a 2019 recommendation that speaks to modernization that he suggested they take another look at.

Mr. Maltby noted he'll add to his list of things to inquire about whether it's possible to get an update from VA Legislative Affairs, even if it's a subcommittee update so VLA could talk about the basics of how they work. Chair Dexter concurred.

Member Lyon also complemented Member Hoppin on her work for the tracker. He asked whether red on the tracker means they should come at the recommendation from a different direction or figure out if there's nothing that can be done further. He wanted to know what is being done by VA to make sure that students facing emergencies in the future aren't relying on an act of Congress to maintain their housing, as they saw at the beginning of COVID.

Member Lyon continued, sharing that they are entering a new era with the GI Bill which was originally designed in 1944. He reviewed the different iterations and changes to the GI Bill over the years and if parody might be present that they could work towards or research.

Member Hoppin asked Mr. Maltby if he was able to clarify if there is a difference between VA stating or not stating non-concur, and if it means the door is still open for that recommendation. Mr. Maltby hesitated to speak for legislative affairs as those in Education Service did draft starting points of some of the responses, so it's across VA effort. He reiterated that he would try to bring someone in who could help clarify this point. He suggested it could be saying that the Committee would have to make a recommendation that does not involve a legislative change. Mr. Maltby also pointed out the guest from the Office of Information and Technology regarding IT program funding had arrived.

IT Funding Overview

Chair Dexter welcomed Riley Ross from VA's Office of Information and Technology, Education Services IT Funding and gave him the floor to begin his presentation.

Mr. Ross thanked the Committee for having him and introduced himself as the Deputy Director of the Education and Veteran Readiness and Employment product line, the VA IT group responsible for implementing and running all of the IT applications utilized by education service with the exception of the Digital GI Bill application, which is managed by Accenture Federal Services. He defined his team's role in the Digital GI Bill effort is one of concurrent project management. He then gave a history of the BDN retirement effort under the BIP contract, and shared how COBOL based mainframe computer costs VA \$19 million a year, will cost \$20 million a year next year, and \$21 million a year in 2024, and they now have clear dates on when BDN support will end for the VA.

Mr. Ross emphasized the importance of attaching IT dollars to legislation. He covered the recent history of the Comery Act and noted it didn't initially have any modernization components to it, and only modernized business processes so his team had to make adjustments to all of the legacy applications in order to increase the performance and strain put on the BDN. He noted that VET TEC was implemented because Colmery didn't have any IT dollars attached specifically to it, so VET TEC became kind of a shadow IT effort until more could be done.

He shared how, now that they have IT dollars attached to the Digital GI Bill, they're making an incredible effort to do all the modernization work that needs to be done for BDN retirement, which will happen in September 2024. He noted that they hope to have the payments from Digital GI Bill sent from Empower instead of BDN by September 2023. He also shared his concern about the Honoring our PACT Act and how it would affect everything if IT dollars were not attached to it either, as it could cause an increased number of transactions going through which could have an impact on the GI Bill. He predicted a need for performance improvements and increased monitoring, and if IT couldn't concurrently do that and keep Digital GI Bill an Enterprise priority, then it can risk the BDN decommissioning timeline.

Mr. Ross suggested IT is in a good place to be able to deliver for the Digital GI Bill on time and emphasized the importance of assigning IT dollars to any modernization efforts as they will all need the help of IT to move forward. He assured the Committee the IT team would reprioritize, and shift, and get creative, but creativity has a history of creating shadow IT projects that later need to be accounted for in the sustainment of those systems. Having finished his presentation, Mr. Ross asked if the Committee had questions for him.

Dr. Warrick shared that she works for the VA medical center and that those systems were leaders in information technology, especially electronic health records. She asked if it's because the system was considered a premiere system and has been protected for so many years that people are reluctant to change? Mr. Ross answered in the negative, that he thinks it is just because it's shown to be reliable, and shared that there

needs to be a general consensus to get off of the BDN mainframe. He noted the risk with that change, however, and that the risk attached to it could contribute to hesitation as if there are any mistakes, a lot of Veterans and beneficiaries would be without their benefits.

Member Lyon thanked Mr. Ross for the depth of detail from his technical knowledge and presentation. He asked Mr. Ross how he would classify the difference with IT on the Veterans Health Administration side which has been classified as world class and cutting edge, versus the VBA side which deals with benefits.

Mr. Ross noted he was not familiar with everything on the VHA side, but that they do still have antiquated systems such as CAPRI which, like BDN, is very reliable. He pointed out the difference between CAPRI going down having a negative impact on Veteran's health and treatment, where if BDN goes down, people don't get paid.

Dr. Butler asked for a high level perspective from the student Veteran's perspective of what they have to think about in terms of looking at, what are the sorts of things a student might encounter as a result of the items Mr. Ross discussed, and what are the kind scenarios that might play out that they have to think about from a student and educational institution perspective?

Mr. Ross answered if VA IT are doing their job right, students shouldn't notice much difference other than GUI changes. He shared that with the Digital GI Bill, the managed service vendor are building a program that will be hosted on VA.gov by My Education Benefits, and are still maintaining the GI Bill comparison tool systems that are also hosted on VA.gov. He also noted they have implemented text messaging and e-mail communication, which the students will see on the front end of the modernization work. He suggested the worst case scenario would be that payments are missed, or overpayments happen that would lead to having to ask for the money back. He added that for schools, the interface is being built directly into the managed service environment for schools as well and will replace a legacy application called VA ONCE, which is slated for decommissioning and to move over to a new school interface this calendar year. He also noted a training effort for school certifying officials.

With no further questions, Chair Dexter thanked Mr. Ross for his time and he took his leave.

Committee Discussion

Chair Dexter shared they have until 12:00 p.m. for ongoing discussion time and suggested they pick up where they left off with their previous discussion. She reminded the Committee that they left off with the concurrence to continue the distance learning subcommittee as there is still continued work to be done in that space regardless of

whether we are out of the pandemic or not. She asked if there was any further discussion for retaining the committee.

Dr. Butler brought up Vice Chair Hauk's earlier comments about recommendation 8 and whether to move forward. He suggested they don't let it drop, as Member Lyon had some good points about how they may approach it in a different way. He wanted to ensure there was concurrence from the Committee on continuing recommendation 8 before they move forward. Chair Dexter noted it appeared everybody was in concurrence not to drop the recommendation just because it's coded as red, but to reframe and reassess.

Chair Dexter thanked the Committee again for their flexibility with going back and forth on topics, and asked if there were any other comments, suggestions, or concerns with the use of that format. Vice Chair Hauk agreed that they should utilize it to track progress going forward, and then integrate new recommendations going forward with a new tab so everything is in the same place for the Committee. Chair Dexter and Dr. Warrick concurred. Member Hoppin suggested they solidify what the colors in the tracker would mean as far as red, yellow, and green, and to note it in the tracker so there is no confusion. The Committee decided that they could add more colors, such as orange between the red and yellow, in order to further define items, and that they would further discuss it and finalize the colors and meanings via e-mail.

Chair Dexter went back to the topic of subcommittees and distance learning, and that they have established that the distance learning subcommittee will be continued. She told the subcommittee it would be up to them to determine what to dive into and bring that forward. She move on to the next subcommittee, modernization, and noted the discussions the previous day around modernization. She noted how the tracker showed how the Committee was more focused on modernization of technology platforms and IT and integration, but there was more discussion about modernization of other aspects regarding benefits. She opened the floor to discussion and thoughts regarding how the subcommittee moves forward, especially to Member Quintas, who is the subcommittee lead.

Member Quintas shared his pleasure with the progress made thus far, feeling that they had highlighted the major issues. He suggested most of their work going forward might be mainly dependent on the feedback they get in Q3, but that he welcomes the idea of opening up the modernization conversation beyond IT. He agrees they needed to keep an eye on IT modernization and follow up on progress, but that they should move on to other aspects of modernization. He suggested they frame modernization and how it affects utilization and outcomes and see if the VA is thinking about how to maximize utilization and outcomes in a more modern, 2032 kind of framework.

Dr. Butler agreed with Member Quintas and recalled comments the previous day about how higher education is changing as far as length of a semester, types of certificates, degrees, online, not online. Member Quintas asked if those comments were more in line with distance learning instead of modernization. Dr. Butler shared that his interpretation is that distance learning is part of it but it's the bigger picture of how education is being delivered. Member Quintas thanked Dr. Butler and asked others to join on the conversation, calling on Vice Chair Hawk.

Vice Chair Hawk shared that his view of modernization is future proofing as to how education is going to look like going forward. He suggested it's a good starting point in terms of how to frame a modernization discussion, because then you get into aspects of policy, process, people, technology, and those different capability areas and what does that mean in terms of modernization? He also agreed with Member Quintas's caution about potential spillover from modernization into distance learning or another subcommittee. He asked how they could start to look at opportunity and options for modernization, as well as how to future proof the GI Bill going forward.

Member Salgado recommended the Committee be mindful of the approval element, as they may be unable to get approval from SAA or others about how to approve some types of ideas and programs such as virtual reality or travel elements.

Member Lyon reminded the Committee that Mr. Maltby had previously shared a link with them about the expiration of the Montgomery GI Bill. Member Lyon then reviewed the history of the GI Bill as to how it has had several forms and different ways it has been utilized. He noted that currently there are two GI Bills, the Montgomery and Post-9/11, with the Montgomery GI Bill being shut down in the future. He shared that he was interested in the concept of GI Bill 2030 relative to VA's mission and work in front of them.

Member Lyon continued, sharing statistics of how nearly 75% of them while in school using their GI Bill are going to be working full or part time, nearly 50% will be working full time, and nearly 25% will be working part time. He also shared that 52% of the modern Post-9/11 student Veterans are in a relationship with children and nearly 20% are single parents. He suggested the VA looks at students in this light, instead of as the traditional 22 year old with no bills to pay for whom a monthly housing allowance would cover all of their expenses.

He shared that the top three majors for Veterans using the GI Bill are business, STEM, and health related fields, and that the VA is misaligning how the benefit works for how the majority of folks transition out of the military. He suggested a change in thinking or in organizing how they administer the benefit to best support the population more fully

by meeting folks where they are, enriching them with a great benefit, and setting them up for successful futures when they're done using that benefit.

Member S. Roberts concurred with Member Lyon's comments. She noted that there is a focus of organizations leaning more into skills based hiring, and suggested they also consider what that means for future proofing of the GI Bill and if there's opportunities for more flexibility in the way they think about degrees. She wondered if there was a way to think around some of the communities facing additional barriers and their access to leveraging their benefits, as these communities may be facing additional layers of barriers in accessing their dib because of some of the intersectional identities they face.

Member Hoppin concurred with Member S. Roberts and Member Lyon and shared that she has heard the dependent community speaking about how they feel DoD and military benefits are built with a 1950s housewife mentality in mind, making it very outdated. She asked if they can encourage creating avatars of the communities they're serving in order to get everyone on the same page.

Chair Dexter thanked everyone for their detailed comments and suggestions. She summarized that it seemed they were suggesting modernizing the usage of the GI Bill to meet the needs of the workforce. She suggested it could be an opportunity to merge what was initially intended under the OTJ apprenticeship to be under modernization instead.

Mr. Maltby shared he was making a list of potential subcommittee briefings or full Committee briefings as the discussion has progressed. He noted that often in VA, you find that multiple people are trying to solve the same problem from different angles, so he suggested once the Committee decides how it wants to structure the subcommittees and who will be on them, he can then get the meetings scheduled and pitch a series of potential topics based on their discussions.

Member Quintas shared his concern on the overlap between subcommittees and recommended each subcommittee draft a statement on the work they intend to do. He added he would also include the work they won't do, to help delineate between subcommittees. He suggested his subcommittee would be an expansion of the modernization theme beyond IT.

Chair Dexter noted concurrence from Committee members. She summarized that for the subcommittee on modernization, it will continue but it will go beyond IT, specific themes to be determined.

Mr. Maltby shared that they needed to notify the Secretary that the subcommittees exist but that there isn't a specific constraint about how they are structured or how much detail needs to be provided. He requested they get a consensus on the fall meeting

dates so he could put it on the calendar. The Committee decided to meet on November 29 and 30, 2022, potentially in person in Washington, D.C.

Chair Dexter moved the conversation to OJT and apprenticeships and requested thoughts or suggestions on the continuance of the subcommittee. Member D. Roberts, lead for the subcommittee, suggested they continue forward because apprenticeship is fairly large and continues to grow and so should be looked at. Member Hoppin, a previous member of the OJT subcommittee, agreed with Member D. Roberts. She suggested there were other gaps to review and always room for more people and apprenticeships in on the job training. Member D. Roberts offered any Committee members who wanted one a tour of any of the registered apprenticeship areas.

Member Quintas brought up an earlier comment about non-Veteran beneficiaries in regards to OJT. Chair Dexter suggested the OTJ and apprenticeships subcommittee share thoughts on if they are focused on relations, especially the military spouse population, or if it goes beyond OJT and apprenticeships.

Member Hoppin shared how they had found a knowledge gap when it came to active duty military spouses specifically because you don't need to use your GI Bill benefits to access apprenticeships, and military spouses are not eligible to use GI Bill benefits for apprenticeships if the service member is active duty, which changes when the service member transitions and becomes a Veteran. Member D. Roberts noted it was also tied into the DoL Advisory Committee for Veterans Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach. He shared that the subcommittee had worked in conjunction with that advisory committee at DoL to help the recommendations they make strengthen the recommendations made at DoL.

Dr. Warrick suggested the subcommittee explore how the VA can expand to more types of white collar apprenticeships like bookkeeping, nurse's assistant, cyber security, or IT, for examples. She shared how her institution is a certified apprenticeship institution but they are having trouble getting people to think about apprenticeships in a non-traditional way. Chair Dexter concurred.

Mr. Maltby stated he had contacted the Advisory Committee Management Office, who said they could and should be inviting the ex officio members. He shared they did not have to coordinate through any particular VA channel, so he could reach out directly. He requested assistance from any person who might have information on the best way to do so. Chair Dexter offered to help with contacting James Rodriguez. She also asked Member D. Roberts if he was able to find out what DoL's response had been to the recommendations made that align with this Committee's recommendations.

Member D. Roberts stated he was unable to share at this time but would do so as soon as he was able. He also suggested they meet or speak to the DoL's Office of

Apprenticeship Advisory Committee to see what their goals and thoughts are. Chair Dexter thanked him.

Member Lyon suggested that, from discussion so far, there appears to be under-utilization of the GI Bill for things the Committee is discussing such as apprenticeships or different types of degrees, especially for older Veterans who have not utilized their education benefits. Member D. Roberts thanked Member Lyon for his comments and concurred.

Chair Dexter asked the Committee if there was consensus to continue the subcommittee for OJT and apprenticeships titled as is, and the Committee concurred. She then asked if they felt there needed to be a fourth subcommittee with a different topic they might feel is missing. There were no further comments on the topic.

Member Lyon addressed Mr. Maltby, letting him know the e-mail addresses for the acting Assistant Secretary of Education for Post-Secondary Education. Dr. Warrick shared she knew that person, Michelle Cooper, and has worked closely with her. She offered to CC: Mr. Maltby in an e-mail introducing him to Ms. Cooper.

Chair Dexter stated the Committee had discussed all items on the agenda and asked if there were any other questions or points of discussion the Committee members wanted to get through before their next speaker. Mr. Maltby offered to e-mail the Committee all potential briefings he has tracked thus far so they can add to or clarify any items. Chair Dexter agreed an e-mail was a good idea.

Member Lyon asked if Mr. Maltby had the ability to get a list of recommendations occurred from VACOE that are now internal VA policy or have been implemented. Mr. Maltby said he would look into it, and shared it was the VA's official stance as of the May 202 meeting that they had done everything the Committee had asked them to so far, or had said they couldn't. Member D. Roberts concurred with Member Lyon's request.

Member Lyon asked Member D. Roberts if there were any other briefings he had seen by the vantage point of having participated in other committees that may benefit the VACOE's work. Member D. Roberts noted he was already going through reports he had gotten from other committees to see if anything could cross over, and had made a note to himself to go through them. He shared that he would send any connections through e-mail to the Committee.

Single Sign-On Executive Order Update

Chair Dexter welcomed Chris Johnston from VA's Office of Information and Technology to the meeting. Mr. Johnston asked Mr. Maltby if there was anything he wanted to note

before he began his presentation. Mr. Maltby clarified the goal for his presentation for the Committee's edification is the overlap of their recommendation around Single Sign-On and the executive order on customer experience that specifically called VA to implement a Single Sign-On initiative. He requested an update on the progress made on the recommendation.

Mr. Johnston began by introducing himself as the Deputy Chief Technology Officer for Digital Experience, sharing that the work they do is mostly around the notion of modernizing VA's digital facing efforts, mostly those that Veterans use. He clarified he did not speak on behalf of all of OIT, only the CTO's office and the work that they're doing. He shared his goals for the presentation are to provide the big picture of the overall modernization strategy that VA is trying to take on, largely with regard to the digital experience.

Mr. Johnston shared that VA's websites and experiences traditionally have represented the VA's view of the VA, not the Veteran's view of the VA. He mentioned therefore, the Veteran's experience is essentially the organizational hierarchy of the bureaucracy of the VA. To address this, in 2017 their CTO Charles Worthington collected a group of leaders across VA to create a digital modernization vision with tools that people like to use and are as good as what is used in the private sector.

He noted the principles that underpinned this strategy are single source of truth, single front door, personalized experience, and access to all digital tools in one place. He reviewed how his team wanted to create a customer focused homepage, a way for people to log in and see that personalized view with actions people can take without navigating to a separate website with a separate login.

Member Quintas felt that one of the measures of whether this concept works is whether someone enters through one door and then explores other doors on the same interaction. He asked if they are going to do anything on the top that directs Veterans to other tasks they can complete while they are at the website, separate from what they had come to the website to accomplish. He also asked if they would be measuring whether someone comes in to do something for education, for example, and also at the same time within the same sign on clicks over and does health as well.

Mr. Johnston said they had lofty aspirations, and it's going to be slower than they would like, but they are working on what Member Quintas asked about in a few ways. He shared that his team is trying to be able to draw information out of the many varied systems that determine eligibility and try to reflect back to Veterans if there is something they might be eligible, and direct them to that information. He noted they had not yet been able to connect data in a way that has been as useful as they want to, but they are working on it and will be able to measure those things once they're real.

He shared another effort happening within the VA called the Enhanced Statement of Benefits, which is supposed to be a similar idea where they can reflect to Veterans the things they're eligible for so they are more likely to apply for them. Mr. Johnston noted his skepticism, as they don't want to lead Veterans down a path for them to be denied, and so they need to gather more information to see if they're eligible first.

Member Quintas thanked Mr. Johnston for his response and asked if there would also be some kind of reminder that shows the Veteran what they had not yet filled out or considered as far as benefits. Mr. Johnston agreed with the onboarding or empty state situation.

Mr. Johnston then continued, showing visual examples of what the VA.gov homepage looked like from 2005 to 2018. He reiterated it was about VA, by VA, for VA. He shared that his team did a lot of user centered design with Veterans and card sorts to determine how people think about VA and how they would use the website. He noted how the current website is much more task oriented and how the global navigation is simplified so everything for Veterans is under one menu, and everything for everybody else is under a second menu. He shared a visual example of the current VA home page, noting that they are starting on another iteration to take it to the next level.

Member Velazquez shared her experience working with elderly Veterans and helping them to navigate the VA website, noting it is not a tech friendly experience for them. She approved of the changes that will highlight what benefits they have and what they might be eligible for to help eliminate guess work.

Mr. Johnston thanked Member Velazquez for sharing her experience and concurred with her. He noted the VA has a long way to go still in terms of asking a Veteran questions over and over again to get them to where they need, instead of just asking the questions once and maintaining that information for each individual Veteran. He then shared examples of how they have made the VA website more accessible and easier to view on any device.

He shared that the VA.gov platform itself has a dozen teams working on every aspect of the experience for the Veterans, how it is based on Amazon so it's scalable, and is in the cloud. He noted how the platform also has tools for designers, like the design system tools for content writers so there are minimum quality standards that need to be met, which are code quality, reliability quality, content quality, design quality, and accessibility. Mr. Johnston showed some statistics on satisfaction scores for VA.gov, sharing that it went from the high 40s prior to the relaunch in 2018 to mid to high 60s with the pandemic response. He felt some of the satisfaction could do with login identity.

Mr. Johnston moved on to identity and Single Sign-On. He shared that the goal was to create two credentials, one public and one private, but currently they have to have four credentials. He noted the high cost of maintaining the credentials as well as the security risks, highlighting a high amount of fraud that occurred through DS Logon in 2020 due to the credentials not matching up in security levels. The two credentials they're looking at using are Login.gov and ID.me. He noted that some people have issues with the government handling their personal information and so prefer ID.me, while others don't want a private company handling their personal information and prefer to use Login.gov. He shared his team is also working with Login.gov and the MyHealthVet team to do in-person proofing with Login.gov and that the goal is to remove DS Logon and MyHealthVet altogether, only relying on Login.gov and ID.me.

He noted issues with Single Sign-On and Apple systems, with Apple device users experiencing sign on failure about 30% of the time, and so his team is working with Identity Access and Management and some of their vendors to rectify the issue, while also looking at other solutions to the Single Sign-On issue. He felt the good news was, this is the underlying identity structure of the entire VA.gov platform and so as more and more teams are building on VA.gov platform, they will get automatic access to identity services, Single Sign-On, viewing claim status, education status, health care, and so on.

Mr. Johnston spoke about how they're getting users to utilize the modern credentials, including incorporating Vets.gov, the Explore site, eBenefits, and MyHealthVet into VA.gov so users don't have to navigate to multiple sites. He noted the second part is getting people to Login.gov as a credential to allow access to everything available on VA.gov, as there is a group of users they are going to do a series of communications such as e-mail, direct mail, and a variety of digital outreach efforts in order to encourage people to come to VA.gov and sign up for a Login.gov account to be verified. He noted they are also conducting research on helping those transitioning from active duty to Veteran status get a digital identity so they can access their benefits, and including that curriculum in TAP.

He covered how two factor authentication has shown to be a struggle for some older Veterans who don't understand the need for dual authentication, and who also may not have a second device for that second form of authentication. He shared that they are working to mail physical security keys to Veterans to use instead of a mobile device to authenticate their second factor, though they have still been met with some resistance on using it.

Finally, Mr. Johnston expressed his happiness with how the work his team and others have done for VA.gov is progressing, while noting there is still a lot of work to be done. He asked if there were any questions from the Committee.

Mr. Maltby shared his experience with negative feedback around ID.me, with school certifying officials who are also students being required to have two different verifications with two different accesses to data. He also noted hearing from international students who are dependents of Veterans but do not have Social Security numbers to verify their identity with. Mr. Johnston explained that the two verifications for SCOs was because they were having issues with SCOs who were students logging in and being able to view information about their fellow students, which was a privacy issue. He hadn't heard about Social Security numbers being required for verification, as there were other ways of verification such as using the video proofing process. Mr. Maltby shared the guidance from ID.me is varied because it does reference there are documents you can use that aren't United States Government documents, where elsewhere it says a Social Security number is required. Mr. Johnston said he would look into it.

Member Velazquez thanked Mr. Johnston for an informative presentation from both a user and assistant perspective, and said she was looking forward to how much easier the process can get in the future.

Dr. Butler expressed his shock that Mr. Johnston was running into issues with two factor authentication just because of the importance of it. He noted watching two small private universities shut down due to lack of two factor authentication and hackers demanding ransoms too high for them to pay. He emphasized the importance of security. Mr. Johnston concurred and shared how the VHA Ethics Office considers two factor authentication an ethics issue and wants it to stop, but he noted that was not possible due to the security risks.

Chair Dexter thanked Mr. Johnston for his presentation. Mr. Johnston thanked the Committee for their time and noted he would send the presentation slides to Mr. Maltby to share with the Committee, and that they could follow up with him if they have any questions in the future.

Final Thoughts and Adjournment

Chair Dexter commented on the rich presentation with fantastic information, sharing her excitement for the progress in the future. She asked the Committee if there were any other additional comments or questions before they adjourned for the day. Dr. Butler asked how subcommittees would meet, and Mr. Maltby said it would be best to go through him for scheduling so he can make sure everything is on the schedule, noting that the subcommittee meetings each needed to have either him or Ms. Thomas for it to be official.

Chair Dexter thanked the Committee for their continued work and time. Vice Chair Hauk also thanked the Committee and expressed that he was looking forward to seeing

everybody in person in the fall meeting. There being no further business. Chair Dexter adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m. EST.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mona Dexter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mona Dexter, Chair
Veterans Advisory Committee on Education