## STATEMENT OF SENATOR SCOTT BROWN, RANKING MEMBER

## SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, GOVERNMENT INFORMATION, FEDERAL SERVICES AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

## COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

"Preventing Abuse of the Military's Tuition Assistance Program"

## March 2, 2011

Thank you Chairman Carper. Since today is my first day as the Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, I just want to take a moment to thank you for the warm welcome you have extended to me and my staff. In the last Congress, you and Senator McCain examined some very important issues. During this time of record high deficits, there is a sustained call for fiscal discipline. As such, the oversight role of this Subcommittee has never been more significant. I look forward to working with you in the coming months to find new ways to meet the public's demand for more accountability. This hearing today will be a good start to these efforts.

Since World War II, the federal government has provided financial support to service members and veterans who wish to pursue personal and professional enrichment through higher education. As a 30-year member of the National Guard, I am well aware of how important these incentives are to the recruitment and retention of our all-volunteer force. In addition, they provide the military services with a better educated and better trained force to conduct the increasingly difficult mission of defending our nation.

The challenges of that mission, such as long deployments and inconsistent hours, have created a high demand for alternatives to traditional classroom instruction. As such, the proportion of distance education programs receiving tuition assistance dollars has risen rapidly in recent years. While I welcome the added flexibility that these programs provide our service members, it is up to DoD and the Military Services to help ensure that these programs are delivering a quality education to our service members and sustained value to the taxpayer.

Unfortunately, it seems that the Department of Defense has been slow to react to this new trend. GAO reports that distance education courses accounted for over 70% of total courses taken in fiscal year 2009. Yet, the institutions providing these courses have not been subject to the same quality review process as those providing on-site instruction. According to a recent Bloomberg article, the Defense Department has been working since 2004 to update its policies to include distance education courses. Meanwhile, the contract for conducting the quality reviews has lapsed, and it won't be until late this year that the new polices and contract will be fully implemented.

While I appreciate Mr. Gordon's recent efforts, I implore him to push DoD to stay ahead of the curve in the future. The Department spent over half a billion dollars in fiscal year 2009 on the Tuition Assistance program alone. Taxpayers are demanding more robust oversight over these programs. They must be assured that their hard earned dollars are going towards quality programs that meet the high-standards our service members deserve.

All of us in this room have a role to play in maintaining those high-standards. As a service member, it is deeply troubling to read about soldiers and veterans being left overburdened with student loan debt or taken advantage of by dishonest college recruiters. These are serious problems that require immediate action from the academic community and government alike. Yet, as when examining any heated issue, proper context should be maintained. We must be careful not to target or condemn entire education sectors unfairly, while putting the necessary protections in place to defend against the abuses of those putting profit above student performance.

Distance learning education has provided service members with access to academic and professional opportunities which they previously might not have enjoyed. Effective coordination between DoD, the Military Services, and the Department of Education must be assured to provide the essential visibility and oversight into these programs department-wide. We must ensure that those who serve us honorably are provided the promised quality services and value they deserve.

That said, we welcome Senator Harkin to the Subcommittee. I know he has spent a considerable amount of time looking into these issues. I welcome the chance to listen to his concerns. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman.