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ROA Member Elected to Congress and Hits the Ground Running

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9.0--Miscellaneous

A year ago, Tim Griffin was elected to the United States House of Representatives, representing the 2nd District of Arkansas. Tim is a Major in the Army Reserve and a life member of ROA.^[1] During the George W. Bush Administration, he served as a Deputy Assistant to the President, in the White House. He was deployed to Iraq for a year, in his Army Reserve capacity. After he returned from Iraq, President Bush appointed him the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas. Griffin currently serves in the 112th Congress on the House Armed Services Committee, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the House Judiciary Committee, and also as an Assistant Majority Whip.

In the House, Tim Griffin has gotten right to work on efforts to improve the lives of those who serve in our armed forces and those who have served.^[2] Just recently, he has introduced three bills in the U.S. House of Representatives intended to help veterans and National Guard and Reserve service members.

Expressing his values, Griffin stated last week “As an officer in the Army Reserve, I know firsthand the sacrifices our veterans and current service members – along with their families – have made to protect the liberty we all enjoy. That is why I’ve introduced three bills designed to improve their existing military educational benefits and reduce the delay some veterans experience when visiting the VA.”

Griffin’s first bill, the Franchise Education for Veterans Act (H.R. 3351), would allow veterans to use their GI Bill benefits for education and training in franchise ownership. According to a recent PricewaterhouseCoopers study, there are more than 66,000 veteran-owned franchises in the country, which have created over 815,000 American jobs.

“Many veterans return from serving their country and use their GI Bill benefits to help pay for college,” Griffin said. “Others decide to start a franchise and become job creators. My bill would help these veterans by giving them the freedom to use their hard earned GI Bill benefits toward the educational and training expenses associated with opening a new franchise.”

The second bill, the Veterans Travel Benefits Modernization Act (H.R. 3350), would help alleviate the long lines many disabled veterans experience when they apply for their travel waivers. Currently, all disabled veterans, pensioners and low-income veterans must apply for travel waivers at the beginning of each year. These waivers reimburse veterans for certain travel expenses incurred in order to obtain VA health care services. Griffin’s bill would prevent this annual logjam by changing the deadline to coincide with each veteran’s birth month.

“I’ve heard the concerns of a number of Arkansas veterans who are forced to endure multiple-hour wait times at the VA in order to obtain their travel waivers,” Griffin said. “By spreading out the renewal dates throughout the year, disabled veterans will no longer have to suffer long delays in order to receive the benefits they need.”

Finally, the National Guard and Reserve Equality in Education Act (H.R. 3349), would level the playing field for members of the National Guard and Reserve who are furthering their military education. Specifically, Griffin’s bill would enable distance education program graduates of the Senior Service War College to receive the same recognition and credit as resident graduates. Presently, programs for both resident and distance education students have the same academic accreditation and curriculum, but these programs receive different credit. This difference

hinders distance education graduates from attaining a Joint Qualified Officer designation, thereby hurting their chances for advancement.

“Our National Guard and Reserve units continue to play a critical role in our nation’s defense,” Griffin said. “For these service members, who in many cases have full-time civilian jobs and families that depend on them, distance education is the only way for them to earn their Masters of Strategic Studies Degree. Unfortunately, a graduate who earns their degree through distance education is not eligible to receive a Joint Qualified Officer designation. My bill would end this disparity.”

Major General Bill Wofford, the Adjutant General of Arkansas, welcomed Griffin’s bill.

“We appreciate Congressman Griffin for introducing this bill,” Wofford said. “The Guard is a vital part of America’s ‘Total Force,’ as such we must strive to provide our guardsmen the same opportunities of advancement as our active component service members. Joint credit is becoming increasingly important for the selection of future general officers. This legislation would level the playing field by authorizing guardsmen who attend the non-resident U.S. Army War College the same joint credit as those who attend the active duty course.”^[3]

[1] Two other ROA members were elected to the House of Representatives in 2010 and assigned to the House Armed Services Committee. They are Colonel Joe Heck of Nevada-3 and Lieutenant Colonel Allen West of Florida-22.

[2] For more information on Congressman Griffin, please visit his site at <http://griffin.house.gov/>

[3] Taken from Nov. 10, 2011 Congressman Tim Griffin Press Release, *Griffin: Legislation Would Improve Existing Military Educational Benefits, Reduce VA Benefit Delays*: <http://griffin.house.gov/press-release/griffin-legislation-would-improve-existing-military-educational-benefits-reduce-va>