



# VETERANS EDUCATION SUCCESS

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Congressman Adam Smith Meets with Seattle Veterans about Protecting the GI Bill and Student Veterans**

*Active duty and former service-members earn their educational benefits through honorable service,  
but some schools target veterans with dishonorable practices*

**SEATTLE (October 31, 2018)** – U.S. Representative Adam Smith (D-WA 9th District), Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee, yesterday met with two Seattle-area military veterans who encountered difficulties when they used their GI Bill educational benefits. For-profit schools eager to cash in on federal benefits have targeted Washington veterans with numerous unethical practices, from excessive fees to deceptions about their schools' accreditation, tuition, and other key facts, to being signed up for loans they had not authorized.

Veterans **Brandie Smith** and **DaShawn Taylor** asked for the Congressman's support in addressing the numerous unethical practices by the **University of Phoenix** and other for-profit colleges eager to cash in on their hard-won federal education benefits. From excessive fees to withholding transcripts to signing students up for loans they had not authorized, for-profit schools have saddled too many veterans across the nation with crushing debt, no jobs and zero recourse.

Brandie Smith has nearly three decades of service with the U.S. military. Currently a 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt with the Army Reserves, she previously served for 10 years on active duty with the U.S. Navy. As she approached military retirement, Brandie began to prepare for a second career. An online search brought her the University of Phoenix, and after speaking with a school recruiter she enrolled. Brandie used her Ch. 1607 Reservist GI Bill, coupled with DoD Tuition Assistance and then student loans for her courses and fees. However, as a reservist, she was disproportionately impacted by the legal hurdles and gaps in student coverage - an unnecessary problem, Brandie says, that must be solved.

"A common problem for reservists who attend Phoenix is that the school processes student loan payments before, not after, GI Bill payments from the VA. It's a programmed institutional windfall for the schools and it unnecessarily leads to higher costs for students, especially reservists like me. It's an unfair process that has to change."

DaShawn Taylor served in the U.S. Army for more than 6 years. After his honorable discharge, he worked for several years, hitting both highs and lows, before getting his life back together. DaShawn spoke with a friend, who in turn referred him to the University of Phoenix. "After I talked to a school recruiter, I was convinced that Phoenix would lead me to a better career, so I decided to enroll," DaShawn said. "I was wrong."

DaShawn initially covered his costs with his Montgomery GI Bill, but after they ran out and his application for Post-9/11 benefits was denied, he was forced to take student loans to complete his degree. Through hard work and diligence, DaShawn graduated with a bachelor's degree in Business

Management. Not finished, he continued his studies and earned a master's in business administration at the University of Phoenix's Philadelphia campus, which is now closed. From his time at Phoenix, DaShawn has over \$120,000 in student loans. The promises of job placements and employment assistance fell flat, and chronically underemployed, DaShawn struggles to afford his loan payments.

"My \$120,000 degrees, with all of my hard work, are essentially worthless," he said. "I served my country and earned my GI Bill benefits for education but now I see I was pawn to help enrich University of Phoenix. I thought the Veterans Rep there was looking out for my best interests. Wrong again."

Too many for-profit colleges see military veterans like Brandie and DaShawn as nothing more than dollar signs in uniform and target them with deceptive recruiting tactics to get their hands on veterans' GI Bill money. [Veterans Education Success](#), which provides free assistance to veterans who were deceived or defrauded by a college, has been traveling the country, bringing veterans to meet with their representatives in Congress to help highlight their individual stories.

"I deeply appreciate the work of 'Veterans Education Success' and thank them for sharing with me today the obstacles veterans are facing in getting their education," said Rep. Smith. "We need to uphold the spirit and promise of the GI Bill. It is critical that the skills veterans develop in the military are best leveraged to help them excel in the American workforce and that we provide protections against fraudulent higher education institutions. We look forward to working together to ensure military-connected students who use their education benefits are put in a better position that truly prepares them for gainful employment."

"We are grateful to Congressman Adam Smith for meeting today. He understands America's heroes should be treated with honor and respect when they become college students, not targets for consumer fraud," said Tyson Manker, Director of Veterans Engagement at Veterans Education Success. "He will be a trusted ally and help us urge Congress to restore benefits to all student veterans who, through no fault of their own, were targeted with fraudulent and deceptive practices by unethical colleges and schools."

[Veterans Education Success](#) is a veteran advocacy organization whose mission is to protect and defend the integrity and promise of the GI Bill and other federal education programs for veterans and servicemembers. The organization offers free legal services, advice, and college and career counseling to veterans, their survivors, and families who faced college fraud or abuse in using their GI Bill. VES also helps veterans participate in their democracy by engaging Congressional representatives, and conducts non-partisan research on issues of concern to student veterans, including student outcomes and debt levels. Additional information is available at [www.veteranseducationsuccess.org](http://www.veteranseducationsuccess.org)

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