



VETERANS EDUCATION SUCCESS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 27, 2017

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U. S. Representative Suzanne Bonamici meets with Oregon Student Veterans about Protecting the GI Bill and Student Veterans

*Active duty and former service-members earn educational benefits through
Honorable service, but some schools use dishonorable practices to target Veterans*

PORTLAND – U.S. Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) met at PCC Rock Creek today with a group of Oregon military veterans, including some who encountered difficulties when they used their GI Bill educational benefits. For-profit schools eager to cash in on federal benefits have targeted Oregon 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.

Luis Lopez joined the U.S. Marine Corps reserves in 1995. He used his free time to attend Linn-Benton Community College in Albany, where he earned his **Associates of Arts Oregon Transfer (AAOT)** degree. After completing his first enlistment, in 2001 Luis transitioned to Active Duty where he served as a recruiter then company Gunny until his retirement in 2009. Not long after, Luis decided to continue his education, and in 2011 used his post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits to enroll at the **University of Phoenix**. Unfortunately, Phoenix refused to accept many of Luis' AAOT credits, and forced him to enroll in several Phoenix-taught courses he'd already taken. Luis eventually graduated with a bachelor's degree in business management, but feels disheartened. "University of Phoenix had me take classes that should have been credited. I feel like it was a major waste of time and money." Luis is now employed with U.S. Homeland Security as statewide Area Commander for the department's uniformed division.

Kevin Bourgault, PhD enlisted as an infantryman in the U.S. Army in 1991. During his first enlistment, he deployed to Somalia with the 10th Mountain Division where he served in direct combat. After being

Honorably discharged, Kevin used the Montgomery GI Bill educational benefits to attend **Duke University**, where he earned his master's degree in public policy, with a concentration in nonprofit management, research, and design. From there, he worked for several years with Air Forces Special Operations for several years as a para-rescue training program contractor before enrolling in the doctorate program at the University of Oregon. He completed his dissertation, *Perceptions of Higher Educational Credentialism in Tribal Communities*, earning his PhD in Education. A member of the Skokomish Tribe, Kevin is currently involved in a number of veterans-related projects, including the development of Camp Alma, an in-patient wellness camp and integration program in Lane County, OR that he created for veterans with PTSD. He also serves as board secretary for Veterans Legacy of Oregon, a nonprofit organization.

Valdez Bravo enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1995. After being Honorably discharged, in 2004 he went to work serving his fellow veterans at the VA Portland Health Care System. That same year, Valdez used his Montgomery GI Bill educational benefits to attend **Portland Community College**. Two years later, he transferred to **Portland State University** where he eventually graduated with a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in Writing and Film, *magna cum laude*. Valdez then enrolled in a unique educational program with the **Department of Veterans Affairs**, where he participated in the Army-Baylor Graduate Program in Health and Business Administration at Fort Sam Houston. Since then Valdez has worked in a number of advanced positions at the Portland VA, where he now serves as a healthcare administrator charged with improving the delivery of service to veterans and their families. After earning his MHA/MBC, in 2017 Valdez ran for and was elected as the Vice Chair of the Oregon Democratic Party. So after he was elected as a Trustee on the Portland Community College Board of Directors (Zone 5) at his alma mater, PCC, where he represents parts of SW Portland and Beaverton.

Shawn Bernheisel joined the U.S. Navy as an Aviation Machinist in 2005. After being Honorably discharged in 2009, he returned to the workforce for several years. In 2015, Shawn used his post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits to enroll at **Lane Community College** in Eugene, where he currently studies graphic design. He is scheduled to graduate next year.

“We are grateful to Congresswoman Bonamici for meeting today to discuss issues important to student veterans,” said Tyson Manker, Veterans Advocate at [Veterans Education Success](#), which provides free

assistance to veterans who were deceived or defrauded by a school. “Unfortunately, too many for-profit colleges see veterans as nothing more than dollar signs in uniform, which has led to many abuses. America’s heroes should be treated with honor and respect when they become college students, not targets for consumer fraud.”

“Higher education is a great investment, and I applaud these veterans for pursuing an education with their GI Bill benefits,” said [Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici](#). “PCC Rock Creek does an excellent job supporting students who are veterans, and the college has also helped students who have been deceived by for-profit institutions in the past, including former ITT nursing students. Unfortunately, the closures or unscrupulous practices of some for-profit colleges have impeded veterans in achieving their educational goals. As a leader on the Education and the Workforce Committee in Congress, I’ll continue working to crack down on deceptive practices and to make sure veterans are supported and treated fairly by all higher education institutions.”

Lawmakers in Congress have taken action to restore benefits to some student veterans who, through no fault of their own, were targeted with fraudulent and deceptive practices by unethical for-profit colleges and schools. For example, H.R. 3218 the ‘*Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017*’ was recently signed into law, and will provide relief to veterans who attended now-defunct colleges. Congresswoman Bonamici voted in favor of this legislation, the full text of which you can read [here](#).

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