The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act (S. 22)

Informational Packet

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3. "GI Bill falling short of college tuition costs," *The Boston Globe,* February 10, 2008.
4. "We Need a New GI Bill," *The Wall Street Journal,* January 25, 2008.
5. "Reward for Service," *The Washington Post,* November 11, 2007.
6. "A Post-Iraq G.I. Bill," *The New York Times,* November 9, 2007.

FACTS ABOUT SENATOR WEBB'S BIPARTISAN G.I. BILL, THE "POST-9/11 VETERANS EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE ACT" (S.22)

May 2008

SUMMARY

The bipartisan Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act (S.22), is designed to expand the educational benefits that our nation offers to the brave men and women who have served us so honorably since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The bill would closely resemble the educational benefits provided to veterans returning from World War II. A bipartisan House companion bill, H.R. 5740, was introduced on April 9, 2008.

BACKGROUND

Our country has a tradition – since World War II – of offering educational assistance to returning veterans. In the 1940s, the first "G.I. Bill" helped transform notions of equality in American society. The World War II G.I. bill paid for veterans' tuition, books, fees, a monthly stipend, and other training costs. Approximately 7.8 million veterans used the benefits given under the original G.I. bill in some form, out of a wartime veteran population of 15 million. For every dollar invested in veterans, seven dollars were generated.

Over the last several decades, Congress passed a number of other G.I. bills that also gave educational benefits to veterans. However, benefits awarded under those subsequent bills have not been as expansive as our nation's original G.I. bill. Currently, veterans' educational benefits are administered under the Montgomery G.I. Bill. This program is designed for peacetime – not wartime – service.

MAJOR PROVISIONS

- Increased educational benefits would be available to all members of the military who have served on active duty since September 11, 2001, including activated reservists and National Guard. To qualify, veterans must have served at least three to thirty-six months of qualified active duty, beginning on or after September 11, 2001.

- The bill provides for educational benefits to be paid in amounts linked to the amount of active duty served in the military after 9/11. Generally, veterans would receive some amount of assistance proportional to their service for 36 months, which equals four academic years. Veterans would still be eligible to receive any incentive-based supplemental educational assistance from their military branch for which they qualify.

- Benefits provided under the bill would allow veterans pursuing an approved program of education to receive payments covering the established charges of their program, up to the cost of the most expensive in-state public school, plus a monthly stipend equivalent to housing costs in their area. The bill would allow additional payments for tutorial assistance, as well as licensure and certification tests.

- The bill would create a new program in which the government will agree to match, dollar for dollar, any voluntary additional contributions to veterans from institutions whose tuition is more expensive than the maximum educational assistance provided under S.22.

- Veterans would have up to fifteen years, compared to ten years under the Montgomery G.I. Bill, after they leave active duty to use their educational assistance entitlement. Veterans would be barred from receiving concurrent assistance from this program and another similar program.

CO-SPONSORS, SUPPORTERS

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act has 57 cosponsors in the Senate, including lead co-sponsors Chuck Hagel (R-NE), John Warner (R-VA), and Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ). The House companion bill, H.R. 5740, introduced by Rep. Harry Mitchell (D-AZ), Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA), Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL), and Rep. Peter King (R-NY), has 300 cosponsors in the House, a majority of its membership. (As of May 20, 2008).

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act has been endorsed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), The American Legion, the Military Officers' Association of America (MOAA), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), AMVETS, the Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA), the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS), the Student Veterans of America (SVA), the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and the Partnership for Veterans' Education, a consortium of military, veterans, and higher education associations such as the American Council on Education (ACE) and the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU).

KEY POINTS MADE BY SENATOR WEBB

- **Currently, veterans' educational benefits are administered under the Montgomery G.I. Bill—a program designed primarily for peacetime – not wartime – service.** With many of our troops having served two, three or four tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is past time to enact a new veterans' education program modeled on the World War II era G.I. bill. These individuals have a short window of time in which to take advantage of an educational benefit after serving, and with six years already passed since 9/11, that window is now closing for many.

- **The G.I. Bill of the World War II era sparked economic growth and expansion for a whole generation of Americans; a more robust G.I. bill holds the same potential for today's economy.** The United States has never erred when it has made sustained new investments in higher education and job training – and its veterans. Educated veterans have higher income levels, which in the long run increases tax revenues. Approximately 7.8 million veterans used the benefits in some form, out of a wartime veteran population of 15 million. For every dollar invested in WWII veterans, seven dollars were generated.

- **A strong and reliable G.I. bill will have a positive effect on military recruitment**. Better educated veterans also have a **more positive readjustment experience** and lower levels of post-traumatic stress disorder.

- **The education of our nation's veterans is a cost of war.** A very small percentage of Americans have stepped forward to serve our country through military service; they have earned the right to have a bright future when they have completed their service. A G.I. bill that properly rewards honorable service is the right thing to do. **The estimated $2.5 – $4 billion a year needed for the program equals less than one week of war in Iraq.**

- Three former Presidents, a dozen U.S. Senators, three Supreme Court Justices and fourteen Nobel Prize winners went to school on the G.I. bill. Under today's Montgomery G.I. Bill, these same leaders would receive only a fraction of the money necessary to get the same level of education.

"Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act"
Section-by-Section Summary

Section 1: **Short title**. "Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act."

Section 2: **Findings**. That the United States was attacked on 9/11, that active duty service has been especially arduous since that time, that the current educational assistance programs for veterans are outmoded, and that it is in the interest of a grateful nation and its people to provide a program of educational benefits to these veterans which equates to the original World War II G.I. Bill.

Section 3(a): **Educational Assistance for Members of the Armed Forces Who Serve After September 11, 2001**. This subsection adds a new Chapter 33 (entitled "Post 9/11 Educational Assistance") to Title 38 of the U.S. Code, with the following new sections:

Section 3301: **Definitions**. This section provides definitions of key terms, including what types of active service qualify for the entitlement, and how programs of education are defined.

Section 3311: **Educational assistance for service in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001 – entitlement**. This section prescribes multiple tiers of aggregate active service which will entitle a veteran to educational benefits under this Act. In general, to qualify, veterans – including activated National Guard and reservists – must have served between 3 months and 36 months of active duty, beginning on or after September 11, 2001.

Section 3312: **Educational assistance – duration**. In general, veterans are entitled to receive some amount of educational assistance for 36 months, equal to four academic years. Includes a protection of entitlement if an individual's education is interrupted due to deployment or transfer.

Section 3313: **Educational assistance – payment and amount**. In general, veterans may receive monetary assistance to pursue an approved program of education leading to an associate's degree or higher as follows: (i) payments covering the established charges of the program, not to exceed what in-state residents would pay at the most expensive public institution in the state in which they are enrolled, (ii) a monthly stipend to cover living expenses based on average housing prices in the area in which the veteran is enrolled, and (iii) a stipend for books and required educational expenses paid prior to each term. [Note that these are basically the same benefits paid to World War II veterans.] These payments and stipends are scaled on a percentage basis, from 40% to 100%, depending upon which tier the veteran qualifies under in Section 3311. This Section also prescribes the timing and nature of such payments, and revised payment guidelines related to education approved on active duty, distance learning education, and less-than-half-time education.

Section 3314: **Tutorial assistance**. Veterans may receive additional payment for tutorial assistance, not to exceed $100/month, for a maximum of 12 months, or until a maximum of $1,200 is used.

Section 3315: **Licensure and certification tests**. Veterans may receive payment for one licensing or certification test, not to exceed the lesser of $2,000 or the test fee.

Section 3316: **Supplemental educational assistance for additional service.** Veterans qualifying for basic educational assistance under this new Chapter 33 are also eligible to receive supplemental educational assistance paid by their service Secretary, or "tuition kickers", if they meet the eligibility requirements defined for such supplemental assistance in Chapter 30.

Section 3317: **Public-Private contributions for additional educational assistance**. Establishes a new program to be implemented by the V.A. Secretary under which institutions of higher education may voluntarily agree to contribute sums to veterans enrolled in their school to make up any difference between what their school charges for tuition and what the new Chapter 33 benefit would provide. This additional assistance would only be available to veterans who qualify for the maximum G.I. bill benefit. Schools would be free to define their own contribution limits, as well as the maximum number of students who would qualify. Under this program, the Chapter 33 benefit would match the schools' additional contribution dollar for dollar, up to 50% of the tuition difference.

Section 3321: **Time limitation for use of and eligibility for entitlement**. Veterans have 15 years (as measured under the provisions of this Section) to use their educational entitlement.

Section 3322: **Bar to duplication of educational assistance benefits**. Veterans who receive educational benefits under this Act may not receive concurrent assistance under another similar program; instead, veterans must elect one program over another.

Section 3323: **Administration**. This Section: (i) gives guidance on interpreting operative terms, and (ii) instructs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide information to veterans regarding this Act's educational benefits, and to prescribe regulations to carry out this Act.

Section 3324: **Allocation of administration and costs**. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall administer this program, and payments shall be made from funds made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the payment of readjustment benefits (mandatory spending). This Section also prescribes ways for veterans to choose to elect into this Act's program from the existing Montgomery G.I. Bill program.

Section 3(b): **Conforming Amendments.** Makes necessary amendments to other chapters to reflect the addition of Chapter 33.

Section 3(c): **Applicability To Individuals Under Montgomery G.I. Bill Program.** Defines which individuals who have eligibility under other educational assistance programs would be eligible for Chapter 33 benefits, and how they would elect to receive benefits under Chapter 33. Clarifies how Chapter 33 benefits will coexist with other educational assistance programs, including which types of education are covered, and how contributions may be refunded. Establishes a 1 August 2009 effective date for Chapter 33.

Section 4: **Increase In Amounts Of Basic Educational Assistance Under The Montgomery G.I. Bill.** Makes a 20% increase in benefits available for educational assistance under Chapter 30, and ensures that benefits will increase annually with the national average cost of undergraduate tuition.

Section 5: **Modification Of Amount Available For Reimbursement Of State And Local Agencies Administering Veterans Education Benefits.** Fixes annual funding for State Approving Agencies at $19,000,000 per year.

As of 5/20/2008

SENATE

Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act (S. 22)

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5. Jeff Bingaman (NM)
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As of 5/20/2008

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274. Rep. Towns, Edolphus [NY-10]
275. Rep. Tsongas, Niki [MA-5]
276. Rep. Udall, Mark [CO-2]
277. Rep. Udall, Tom [NM-3]
278. Rep. Upton, Fred [MI-6]
279. Rep. Velazquez, Nydia [NY-12]
280. Rep. Van Hollen, Chris [MD-8]
281. Rep. Visclosky, Peter [IN-1]
282. *Rep. Walberg, Timothy [MI-7]*
283. Rep. Walden, Greg [OR-2]
284. Rep. Walz, Tim [MN-1]
285. Rep. Wasserman-Schultz, Debbie [FL-20]
286. Rep. Waters, Maxine [CA-35]
287. Rep. Watson, Diane [CA-33]
288. Rep. Watt, Melvin L. [NC-12]
289. Rep. Waxman, Henry [CA-30]
290. Rep. Weiner, Anthony [NY-9]
291. Rep. Welch, Peter [VT]
292. Rep. Wexler, Robert [FL-19]
293. Rep. Whitfield, Ed [KY-1]
294. Rep. Wilson, Charles [OH-6]
295. Rep. Wilson, Heather [NM-1]
296. Rep. Wolf, Frank [VA-10]
297. Rep. Woolsey, Lynn C. [CA-6]
298. Rep. Wu, David [OR-1]
299. Rep. Yarmuth, John [KY-3]
300. Rep. Young, C.W. Bill [FL-10]
301. Rep. Young, Don [AK]

SENATE WORLD WAR II VETERANS AND THE G.I. BILL

SENATOR	Educational Institution & Degree Funded by the G.I. Bill	2007-08 Cost of Annual IN STATE tuition, fees, books & room and board (On Campus)	2007-08 tuition, fees, books & room and board CURRENTLY covered under Montgomery G.I. Bill
Akaka (cosponsor)	University of Hawaii, 1952 Undergraduate Degree	$15,597	$6,093* (39.1%)
Inouye (cosponsor)	University of Hawaii, 1950 Undergraduate Degree	$15,597	$6,093 (39.1%)
	George Washington Law School Juris Doctor Degree	$51,098	$6,093 (11.9%)
Lautenberg (lead cosponsor)	Columbia, 1949 Undergraduate Degree	$49,260	$6,093 (12.4%)
Stevens	UCLA, 1947 Undergraduate Degree	$24,103	$6,093 (25.3%)
	Harvard Law School, 1950 Juris Doctor Degree	$56,822	$6,093 (10.7%)
Warner (lead cosponsor)	Washington & Lee, 1949 Undergraduate Degree	$47,096	$6,093 (12.9%)
	University of Virginia Law School, 1953 Juris Doctor Degree	$53,809	$6,093 (11.3%)
Webb (sponsor)	Naval Academy, 1968 Undergraduate Degree	Federally Funded	Federally Funded
	Georgetown Law School, 1975 Juris Doctor Degree	$53,990	$6,093 (11.3%)
Hagel (lead cosponsor)	University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1971 Undergraduate Degree	$16,190	$6,093 (37.6%)

* According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the estimated average annual MGIB payment if FY '08 is $6,093. The maximum annual benefit under the current MGIB payment is $9,909.

Notable Quotes on Importance & Impact of G.I. Bill

U.S. Senator and G.I. Bill beneficiary Chuck Hagel:

"America owes the men and women who make the sacrifices and carry the burdens of war and military service more than just our gratitude. Our nation has helped our veterans of every war since World War II. Congress should provide these men and women with modernized and relevant GI education benefits that are worthy of their sacrifices. It is only fair and right that our service members have the educational resources to meet the demands of the 21st century. There can be no higher priority for America than our soldiers and their families who have given so much to all of us."

* * * * * *

U.S. Senator and WWII G.I. Bill beneficiary Frank Lautenberg:

"The G.I. Bill provided a true opportunity for me, as it has for millions of Americans. After my military service ended, it gave me the education I needed to succeed in business and in the public sector. Now we have a new generation of veterans who selflessly served our country, and we owe them that same opportunity to achieve their dreams."

* * * * * *

U.S. Senator and WWII G.I. Bill beneficiary John Warner:

"I would not be a United States Senator today had it not been for the G.I. bill."

"We owe [our service members] a tremendous debt of gratitude for their selfless service. Our country must provide our service members with a G.I. Bill fit for a time of war, just as it did for me so many years ago."

* * * * * *

Notable Quotes on Importance & Impact of G.I. Bill

Former U.S. Senator and WWII G.I. Bill beneficiary Robert Dole:

"… I think [the World War II G.I. Bill was] the single most important piece of legislation when it comes to education, how it changed America more than anything I can think of. Because if you get a college education that allows your children to get a college education. And a lot of us don't have any money, our parents didn't have any money. And suddenly this opportunity. They even gave me a left-handed typewriter and a recording machine that I could take to class because I couldn't write with my left hand. [We] ought to take the same care of the veterans today."

* * * * * *

Congressman Christopher P. Carney, Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy Reserve:

"As someone who has served our country, I can tell you that the current Montgomery G.I. Bill is not adequate. This is a peacetime bill, and we must expand it to accommodate our men and women returning from overseas. There is no better way to support our troops than to ensure that they re-acclimate into daily life seamlessly and that they have a bright future ahead of them. A comprehensive G.I. bill, like the one we are introducing today, is a way to achieve this."

* * * * * *

Military Officers of America Association (MOAA):

"S.22 represents a vision, perhaps even a G.I. Bill 'holy grail,' that our nation's warriors surely have earned in service to the nation. … MOAA has long supported many of the features in S. 22, especially: the increase in G.I. Bill benefit rates, the elimination of the $1,200 payroll reduction, extension of the post-service usage period, and establishment of a readjustment benefit for mobilized reservists."

* * * * * *

Frank Yoakum, SGM (Ret.), Legislative Director, Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS):

"Once an enlistment enticement, educational assistance has now become a transition necessity. This legislation is the right thing to do for those who are willing to take up arms and defend this great nation, something less than one percent of Americans are willing to do."

* * * * * *

Prominent GI Bill beneficiaries:

Political Figures:
President George H.W. Bush
President Gerald Ford
President Jimmy Carter
Senator Daniel Inouye
Senator Daniel Akaka
Senator Frank Lautenberg
Senator Ted Stevens
Senator John Warner
Vice President & Senator Al Gore
Senator Dale Bumpers
Senator Bob Dole
Senator George McGovern
Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan
Vice President Walter Mondale
Vice President Spiro Agnew
Chief Justice William Rehnquist
Justice John Paul Stevens
Justice Byron White
Secretary of State Warren Christopher
Secretary of State Henry Kissinger
Special Assistant to President Johnson Jack Valenti

Historians/social scientists:
Howard Zinn
Lewis Milford
William Leuchtenberg
June Willenz
Milton Greenberg
Lewis Yablonsky
Andrew Brimmer

Sports figures:
Abe Pollin
Tom Landry

Astronaut:
Deke Slayton

Poets:
James Dickey
James Wright
Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Randall Jarrell
Frank O'Hara
Anthony Hecht
Richard Wilbur
A.R. Ammons.

Stage and screen writers, directors, producers:
Paddy Chayevsky
Rod Serling
Aaron Spelling
Terry Southern.
Arthur Penn

Prominent scientists/Nobel Prize Winners:
Baruch Blumberg
Leon Lederman
Jack Steinberger
Martin Perl
Ben R. Mottelson
Henry W. Kendall
Val Fitch
Paul Greengard
Irwin Rose
Sherwood Rowland
Paul Boyer
Jack Kilby
Robert C. Richardson
Clyde Lorraine Cowan Jr. (with Frederick Reines)
Jimmy Carter
Al Gore

Novelists and essayists:
Gore Vidal
Norman Mailer
Joseph Heller
Frank McCourt
Art Buchwald
Pete Hamill
Edward Abbey
Elmore Leonard
Mario Puzo
Tony Hillerman

Actors:
Walter Matthau
Robert Duvall
Tony Curtis
Harry Belafonte
Rod Steiger
Gene Hackman
Clint Eastwood
Paul Newman
Jason Robards
Charles Bronson
Ernest Borgnine

Artists:
Robert Rauschenberg
Leo Krikorian
Dan Spiegle
Robert Miles Runyan
Kenneth Noland
LeRoy Nieman
Richard Callner
Ed Rossbach

Source: Edward Humes, author of *Over Here: How the GI Bill Transformed the American Dream.*

The New York Times

Doing the Troops Wrong
By BOB HERBERT
New York Times Column
May 6, 2008

At the top of the list of no-brainers in Washington should be Senator Jim Webb's proposed expansion of education benefits for the men and women who have served in the armed forces since Sept. 11, 2001.

It's awfully hard to make the case that these young people who have sacrificed so much don't deserve a shot at a better future once their wartime service has ended.

Senator Webb, a Virginia Democrat, has been the guiding force behind this legislation, which has been dubbed the new G.I. bill. The measure is decidedly bipartisan. Mr. Webb's principal co-sponsors include Republican Senators Chuck Hagel of Nebraska and John Warner of Virginia, and Democratic Senator Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey.

(All four senators are veterans of wartime service — Senators Webb and Hagel in Vietnam, Warner in World War II and Korea and Lautenberg in World War II.)

Democratic presidential candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are on board, as are Harry Reid, the Senate majority leader, and Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the House.

Who wouldn't support an effort to pay for college for G.I.'s who have willingly suited up and put their lives on the line, who in many cases have served multiple tours in combat zones and in some cases have been wounded?

We did it for those who served in World War II. Why not now?

Well, you might be surprised at who is not supporting this effort. The Bush administration opposes it, and so does Senator John McCain.

Reinvigorating the G.I. bill is one of the best things this nation could do. The original G.I. Bill of Rights, signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1944, paid the full load of a returning veteran's education at a college or technical school and provided a monthly stipend. It was an investment that paid astounding dividends. Millions of veterans benefited, and they helped transform the nation. College would no longer be the exclusive preserve of the wealthy and those who crowned themselves the intellectual elite.

As The New York Times wrote on the 50th anniversary of the G.I. bill: "Few laws have done so much for so many."

"These veterans were able to get a first-class future," Senator Webb told me in an interview. "But not only that. For every dollar that was spent on the World War II G.I. bill, seven dollars came back in the form of tax remunerations from those who received benefits."

Senator Lautenberg went to Columbia on the G.I. bill, and Senator Warner to Washington and Lee University and then to law school.

The benefits have not kept pace over the decades with the real costs of attending college. Moreover, service members have to make an out-of-pocket contribution — something over $100 a month during their first year of service — to qualify for the watered-down benefits.

This is not exactly first-class treatment of the nation's warriors.

The Bush administration opposes the new G.I. bill primarily on the grounds that it is too generous, would be difficult to administer and would adversely affect retention.

This is bogus. The estimated $2.5 billion to $4 billion annual cost of the Webb proposal is dwarfed by the hundreds of billions being spent on the wars we're asking service members to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. What's important to keep in mind is that the money that goes to bolstering the education of returning veterans is an investment, in both the lives of the veterans themselves and the future of the nation.

The notion that expanding educational benefits will have a negative effect on retention seems silly. The Webb bill would cover tuition at a rate comparable to the highest tuition at a state school in the state in which the veteran would be enrolled. That kind of solid benefit would draw talented individuals into the military in large numbers.

Senator Webb, a former secretary of the Navy who specialized in manpower issues, said he has seen no evidence that G.I.'s would opt out of the service in significantly higher numbers because of such benefits.

Senator McCain's office said on Monday that it was following the Pentagon's lead on this matter, getting guidance from Defense Secretary Robert Gates. Under pressure because of his unwillingness to support Senator Webb's effort, Senator McCain introduced legislation with substantially fewer co-sponsors last week that expands some educational benefits for G.I.'s, but far less robustly than Senator Webb's bill.

"It's not even close to the Webb bill," said Paul Rieckhoff, executive director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, an advocacy group.

Politicians tend to talk very, very big about supporting our men and women in uniform. But time and again — whether it's about providing armor for their safety or an education for their future — we find that talk to be very, very cheap.

The Washington Post

Thanking Our GIs

Better benefits, including a college education, would reward troops and entice recruits.

Sunday, April 20, 2008; B06
Washington Post Editorial

TO DATE, 56 senators and more than 200 representatives have signed on to legislation to revamp GI educational benefits. They recognize that the men and women fighting today's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are not getting their due. But if Congress is serious about doing right by America's veterans, it has to do more than come up with a list of names. It's time to enact a new GI bill and pay for it.

Impetus for the bill comes from Sen. James Webb (D-Va.), a veteran with a family history of military service. Mr. Webb and a co-sponsor, Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.), also a veteran, rightly argue that post-Sept. 11 veterans are being shortchanged by a system designed for peacetime that has not kept pace with increased college costs. Their bill, introduced in January 2007, would be true to the original GI bill enacted after World War II in providing a cost-free education to those who serve in the military.

The bill got an important boost last week with backing from Sen. Daniel K. Akaka (D-Hawaii), chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. Even with that support, though, advocates are worried that the bill might not advance, and so they are targeting other influential lawmakers, especially those who sit on important appropriations committees, to add the measure to the emergency supplemental appropriations bill this spring.

Disappointingly, Sen. John McCain, presumptive Republican candidate for president, so far declines to back the measure. He seems to be responding to concerns of the military brass that enhanced educational opportunities could negatively affect retention rates. Not only is it wrong to want people to stay in the military because they have no alternatives, but such thinking ignores the advantages enhanced educational benefits offer in recruitment. To meet recruitment goals, the military has offered bonuses and lowered some of its standards. Imagine being able instead to promise possible recruits a first-class college education.

The bill is not cheap; cost estimates range from $2 billion to $4 billion a year. But better-educated veterans have more favorable readjustment experiences, which means less money spent on treating post-traumatic stress disorder and other difficulties. More to the point, this should be considered part of the cost of war -- and an obligation that the nation should gratefully fulfill.

The Boston Globe

GI Bill falling short of college tuition costs

Pentagon resists boost in benefits

By Charles M. Sennott
February 10, 2008

WASHINGTON - Halsey Bernard made it through a tour in Iraq as a machine gunner. The question for him now is will he make it through the University of Massachusetts.

It isn't a question of academics for the 24-year-old Boston resident. It's about money - and about the obligation of a nation to its fighting men and women. Bernard, who served with the Second Battalion Eighth Marines in Nasariyah, Iraq, in 2003, is one of thousands of veterans who have returned from combat service only to find that their GI Bill college benefits fall far short of actual costs.

"What they tell you on TV and what the recruiters tell you when you go to sign up is: 'Don't worry. College is taken care of.' And it is not true," said Bernard. "Today it is a serious financial struggle and bureaucratic struggle and personal struggle to try to go to college after serving in combat."

The original GI Bill provided full tuition, housing, and living costs for some 8 million veterans; for many, it was the engine of opportunity in the postwar years. But, in the mid 1980s, the program was scaled back to a peacetime program that pays a flat sum. Today the most a veteran can receive is approximately $9,600 a year for four years - no matter what college costs.

Now, five years into the Iraq conflict, a movement is gathering steam in Washington to boost the payout of the GI Bill, to provide a true war-time benefit for war- time service. But the effort has run headlong into another reality of an unpopular war: the struggle to sustain an all-volunteer force.

The Pentagon and White House have so far resisted a new GI Bill out of fear that too many will use it - choosing to shed the uniform in favor of school and civilian life.

"The incentive to serve and leave," said Robert Clarke, assistant director of accessions policy at the Department of Defense, may "outweigh the incentive to have them stay."

Such administration objections infuriate the lead advocate in Congress for upgrading GI Bill benefits, US Senator James Webb, Democrat of Virginia. Webb, a Vietnam veteran and the only serving senator with a son who has seen combat in Iraq, said he simply can't understand why veterans struggling to pay for higher education is not on the nation's political radar screen, particularly in the presidential primary season when the war and the economy are both at the center of the debate.

"I worry about this and what it says about our nation's view of the value of service," Webb said. "We hear from those opposed that it is too expensive and it's too complicated. Excuse me? In 1946, they worked out how to provide for veterans on the back of a memo pad with a stubby pencil. . . . We are five years into the war in Iraq, we need to get this done."

Webb's bill, which has drawn 31 cosponsors but no Senate action since he filed it a year ago, would cover the full cost of attending state university for in-state residents as well as a stipend for living expenses. It is projected to cost about $2.5 billion per year.

The benefit is capped at the cost of the most expensive public state college or university in any given state. In Massachusetts that would be UMass-Amherst, where total student costs for a year - tuition, fees, room, board, and books - run over $20,000.

Reservists - who now get a fraction of the benefit available to active-duty troops, controversial in a war that leans heavily on reserve forces - would also gain from Webb's plan. Under a draft of his bill, all operational troops who served at least two years of active duty would receive the same benefit.

Massachusetts already offers more higher education help to veterans than other states, an $800 annual stipend on top of GI Bill benefits. That has enabled Bernard to hang on financially at UMass-Boston. If the Webb bill were to pass, Bernard's full costs at the university would be comfortably covered, and he could focus on his studies without having to worry every week about making ends meet.

Paul Rieckhoff, an Iraq war veteran and director of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, an organization based in New York, said that enhancing the GI Bill is a solid investment in the country's future. One study he cites suggests that every dollar spent on the original GI Bill created a seven-fold return for the economy.

"Funding the GI Bill as Senator Webb proposes it for one year would cost this country what it spends in Iraq in 36 hours," he said.

Cause of frustration

That promise of an education in return for serving the country is one of the most frequently cited reasons that young men and women join the military, and it is plastered all over recruitment banners and television advertisements.

The limited return on the promise is one of the most common sources of bitterness and frustration that emerge in interviews with Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

They are people like Liam Madden, a 23-year-old who served with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit in Anbar Province in 2004 and 2005 and now attends Northeastern University. "They dangle the promise of education before you when you are recruited, but then they flip it around when they don't want you to leave and warn you that it will only cover a community college and you are better off staying in the military."

Madden, who hails from a pocket of rural poverty in Vermont, said he is barely able to make his tuition payments at Northeastern and has gotten by in part through paid speaking engagements for the small-but-growing organization known as Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Beyond the financial struggle is a daunting bureaucratic obstacle course that can confound veterans and sometimes steer them away from the benefit altogether. That struggle starts with the requirement that all participants buy into the program with a $1,200 upfront payment.

William Bardenwerper, an Army veteran of Iraq with an undergraduate degree from Princeton University, described a six-month odyssey of paperwork in trying to navigate the current GI Bill. He kept a detailed log of his frustrating, and to-date fruitless, effort to access his benefits for graduate school.

"Not to sound elitist," said Bardenwerper, "but if a 31-year-old Princeton grad has a hard time deciphering what he is entitled to, then I have no idea how a 21-year-old armed only with a GED could navigate this system."

Signs of progress

There have been, in recent weeks, some signs that the political logjam blocking Webb's bill may be easing. He has picked up new cosponsors, though there are still only three Republicans among them, including the two senators from Maine. And the Bush administration has hinted at a desire for compromise on the issue. In his State of the Union speech last month, the president spoke of one relatively small shift - making unused GI Bill benefits available to spouses and families of veterans.

But there are few if any indications of a breakthrough. Meanwhile, some private efforts are underway to try to fill the gap for veterans.

One key player is James Wright, president of Dartmouth College, who believes the current GI Bill is outdated and an insult to combat veterans. A Korean War veteran from a working-class background who tapped the GI Bill to launch his academic career, Wright has helped begin a privately funded program in coordination with the American Council on Education to offer college counseling to veterans and help them find financial aid to supplement the GI Bill.

Efforts by Wright, other academic institutions, and individual philanthropists, such as billionaire financier Jerome Kohlberg, who last year announced a $4 million scholarship fund for veterans, are helping a few soldier-scholars. But only a few.

"There's a moral imperative for us to provide for veterans, and there is a practical benefit to educating these men and women who have served their country," said Wright, who last week announced that he will step down at Dartmouth but plans to continue his advocacy for GIs and an enhanced GI Bill. "For us to be failing to live up to that responsibility is unconscionable."

Webb believes such efforts, as noble as they are, do not relieve the federal government of its obligation to provide an opportunity for higher education to those who serve the country.

But Pentagon officials say the risk that an expanded benefit could cut into reenlistment rates is real. Clarke, of the Department of Defense, said it is simply off-base to compare what was offered to World War II veterans to the situation today. There was no concern about retention rates back then, he said; rapid demobilization was the order of the day.

And Clarke said he doubts reports that military recruiters are painting an overly rosy picture of education benefits. "I think recruiters are always going to play up the best case, but I don't think they are going to take that past what is the truth."

Whatever compromise emerges in Washington - if any does - it will do little for veterans like Todd Bowers, 28, who dreamed of attending an elite private college after returning, after being shot in the face, from his second combat tour.

Severely wounded but also incredibly lucky, he recovered well. Ambitious, he enrolled at George Washington University - transferring from the community college in Arizona he had attended before his first tour.

But George Washington is one of the nation's most costly colleges, with total expenses running over $55,000 a year. His GI Bill benefit as a Marine reservist would cover only a small fraction of that, and his savings - all $18,000 he had earned while overseas - and loans couldn't close the gap.

The military sent him his Purple Heart in the mail but told him there was nothing else they could do to help him pay for college. The financial stress, on top of his war trauma symptoms - insomnia, nightmares, memory loss - was too much. In the end, he dropped out.

Today, Bowers spends his time roaming through the Capitol as a lobbyist on veterans issues for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, pressing the case for Webb's bill.

"You end up feeling that the military thinks that all you deserve is a community college. It's pretty disgraceful. I think I can do better, and I think anyone who served the country in combat deserves better," he said.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
Dow Jones Company, Inc.
EE/PR ★★★ WSJ.com

We Need a New GI Bill
By Jerome Kohlberg
January 25, 2008
The Wall Street Journal Op-Ed

New York State Gov. Eliot Spitzer deserves the highest praise for his powerful commitment to the thousands of New York citizen soldiers fighting in the Iraq and Afghanistan war theaters. In his State of the State address this month, he proposed guaranteeing a full-tuition scholarship to these heroic men and women, so that they may attend any State University of New York or City University of New York college or university upon their return.

Mr. Spitzer's initiative should serve as a paradigm for what our nation must do for this new generation of veterans. They have sacrificed so much for us. We owe them honor, respect and the opportunity for a brighter future. We owe them a new GI Bill assuring them a college education.

When my service in the U.S. Navy ended after World War II, America welcomed me home with just such an opportunity: the G.I. Bill of 1944. In those days, veterans' benefits were generous -- the old saying was that if you got into Harvard, the G.I. Bill would pay for Harvard. This legislation allowed me to earn a bachelor's degree from Swarthmore College, a business degree from Harvard, and a law degree from Columbia.

I was among the almost eight million veterans -- more than half of us who returned home safely -- who were suddenly able to pay for the college or university of our choice. Many had never dreamed of going to college before the war.

This unprecedented educational opportunity transformed American society, as a whole generation of blue collar workers became engineers, doctors, lawyers, teachers and entrepreneurs. The economy boomed as we entered the workforce with new skills and training that increased productivity and stimulated innovation.

Sixty years after Pearl Harbor, a new generation of young men and women has now enlisted in the service of our nation. Regardless of our political differences about the war, we must be united in deep appreciation of the exceptional sacrifices made by our brave troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. This includes thousands of members of the Reserve and National Guard, most of whom have also served multiple tours of duty half a world away from their homes and families.

Unfortunately, the educational benefits that were available to WWII-era veterans are no longer afforded to today's returning troops. The sad reality is that while the cost of an education has increased, the benefits available to veterans have not kept up. Today, the GI Bill pays just a fraction of the cost of getting a degree.

Consider, for example, that the maximum educational benefit available to veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan is just $1,101 per month, or $39,636 over four years. Those veterans who served combat tours with the National Guard or Reserves are eligible for even less -- typically just $440 per month. The College Board reports that the average four-year public college costs more than $65,000 for an in-state student, while a private university costs upwards of $133,000.

Moreover, once National Guard and Reserve members leave the military, they are no longer eligible for any benefits. And if service members are discharged because of a disability, their GI Bill benefits are limited to only the equivalent number of months they served, even if their discharge was the result of injuries suffered in combat.

This is as unbelievable as it is unjust.

The severe restrictions of the current GI Bill extend beyond the educational benefit. There is an initial, non-refundable buy-in cost of $1,200 just to be eligible. That is essentially a "combat tax" on 19- and 20-year-olds who are getting ready to put their lives on the line for our country.

Hard as it is to imagine, if they don't use their GI Bill benefits when they return, they never see that money again. Some 30% of veterans don't use any of their GI Bill funds, which translates into more than $230 million going directly into the U.S. Treasury, rather than back to these young men and women.

War veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan must pay tuition, room and board and other college costs upfront out of their own pockets, and then are reimbursed up to their eligible benefit. In addition, benefits used under the GI Bill count against eligibility for federal student aid, with such support reduced if veterans receive any GI Bill funds. And there is a 10-year limit on assistance for current educational benefits.

All these restrictions effectively put the dream of higher education out of reach for far too many of the 1.6 million who have served our nation in the current wars.

I deeply believe that we have a moral responsibility to provide today's returning veterans with the same educational opportunities that my generation received. Mindful of that responsibility, many of us who benefited greatly from the original G.I. Bill have now established a private scholarship fund -- the Fund for Veterans' Education -- to offer the same "full boat" educational opportunities to returning veterans from all 50 states over the next 12 months.

To be sure, this is a limited effort that will only serve a relatively small number of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. However, we view our program as a direct challenge to our elected officials in Washington. Just as President Roosevelt and the Congress did in 1944, they must now choose to commit the resources necessary to fund a comprehensive G.I. Bill for another generation of America's brave soldiers.

Sens. Jim Webb of Virginia, Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas have introduced legislation that would again make that sacred promise to our returning veterans: A promise that says, if you've put your life on the line to help secure America's future, your own educational future will never be in doubt.

Their legislation is good public policy and it is fiscally prudent. In the long run, a new G.I. Bill will more than pay for itself. As our experience proved after World War II, better educated veterans have higher income levels which, over the long run, will inevitably increase tax revenues. A congressionally

mandated cost-benefit analysis concluded that for every $1 invested in education under the original G.I. Bill of 1944, the nation received between $5 and $12 in economic benefits, such as increased tax revenue and heightened productivity.

In my lifetime, the original G.I. Bill was one of this nation's proudest accomplishments and one of its most solemn commitments. We must now renew that commitment to a new generation of men and women who have served our country with extraordinary courage and distinction. In so doing, they will achieve the better lives they so richly deserve. And we will secure a better America.

Mr. Kohlberg, a founding partner of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts and a limited partner of the private equity firm Kohlberg & Co., is chairman of the Fund For Veterans' Education.

The Washington Post

Reward for Service

Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan deserve an improved GI bill.

Sunday, November 11, 2007

Washington Post Editorial

NEARLY A CENTURY after the end of the war that was supposed to end all wars, tens of thousands of Americans are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. The sacrifices of these brave men and women imbue Veterans Day with special meaning. It requires more than pausing between shopping and football to say thank you.

For example: Lasting fixes are needed for the treatment, rehabilitation and compensation of the returning wounded. The crisis in care and disability has been well-publicized, and it's time Congress act on the recommendations of a bipartisan commission formed in the aftermath of a Post investigation of Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Similarly, there is a need to reform the antiquated system of education benefits afforded the men and women in the U.S. military. A bill sponsored by Sens. James Webb (D-Va.) and Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) has focused attention on the inadequacies of a program designed for peacetime, not wartime, service.

The legislation would give veterans of the Sept. 11 era the kind of educational benefits afforded service members at the end of World War II in the first GI bill. Veterans who have served on active duty for at least two years would receive tuition, room and board, and a monthly stipend.

Even though Congress has made changes to the GI benefit several times since its inception, the expansion has not kept pace with the increased costs of college. For example, the maximum a veteran can receive under the current program is about $1,100 per month for four years, or roughly $38,000. The benefits pale in comparison to the actual costs of going to college. There are other problems with the current system, such as how it shortchanges members of the National Guard and reserves who serve combat tours.

Backers of the bill put the cost at $2 billion, but others place it much higher. It's important to calculate the real cost and figure out where the money will come from. But Mr. Webb is right when he argues that the education of the nation's veterans must be considered a cost of war and one that the nation can't afford not to pay.

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A Post-Iraq G.I. Bill
By JIM WEBB and CHUCK HAGEL
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MEMBERS of Congress and other political leaders often say that the men and women who have served in our military since 9/11 are the "new greatest generation." Well, here's a thought from two infantry combat veterans of the Vietnam era's "wounded generation": if you truly believe that our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are like those who fought in World War II, let us provide them with the same G.I. Bill that was given to the veterans of that war.

In terms of providing true opportunity, the World War II G.I. Bill was one of the most important pieces of legislation in our history. It paid college tuition and fees, bought textbooks and provided a monthly stipend for eight million of the 16 million who served. Many of our colleagues in the Senate who before the war could never have dreamed of college found themselves at some of the nation's finest educational institutions.

Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey went to Columbia on the G.I. bill; John Warner of Virginia to Washington and Lee and the University of Virginia Law School; Daniel Inouye of Hawaii to the University of Hawaii and the George Washington University Law School; and Ted Stevens of Alaska to the University of California, Los Angeles, and Harvard Law School.

Veterans today have only the Montgomery G.I. Bill, which requires a service member to pay $100 a month for the first year of his or her enlistment in order to receive a flat payment for college that averages $800 a month. This was a reasonable enlistment incentive for peacetime service, but it is an insufficient reward for wartime service today. It is hardly enough to allow a veteran to attend many community colleges.

It would cover only about 13 percent of the cost of attending Columbia, 42 percent at the University of Hawaii, 14 percent at Washington and Lee, 26 percent at U.C.L.A. and 11 percent at Harvard Law School.

College costs have skyrocketed, and a full G.I. Bill for those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan would be expensive. But Congress has recently appropriated $19 billion next year for federal education grants purely on the basis of financial need. A G.I. Bill for those who have given so much to our country, often including repeated combat tours, should be viewed as an obligation.

We must put together the right formula that will demonstrate our respect for those who have stepped forward to serve in these difficult times. First-class service to country deserves first-class appreciation.

Jim Webb, Democrat of Virginia, and Chuck Hagel, Republican of Nebraska, are United States senators.