



BACKGROUND

Published by the Truman National Security Project

A New GI Bill for the 21st Century

Honoring Our Troops and Creating Tomorrow's Leaders

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16 May 2008

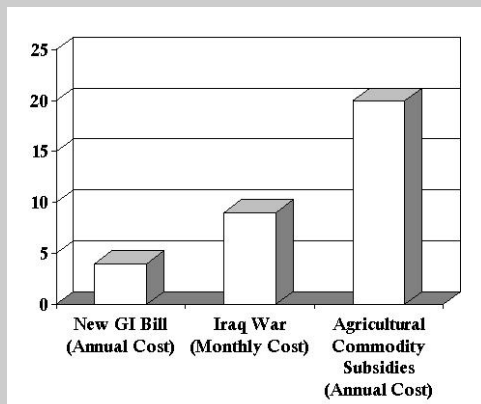
After multiple deployments in the tough environments of Iraq and Afghanistan, our troops are entitled to an education worthy of their service. Sadly, our moral priorities have not kept pace with the sacrifices of our servicemen and women. While the cost of college has skyrocketed, educational benefits have not. Consequently, our veterans are forced to take on substantial loans or enter a volatile job market, all while readjusting to civilian life.

We owe our troops more than debts of gratitude. We owe them a strong start in life, which begins with a quality education. This is exactly what Congress is trying to provide with the New GI Bill. The Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Program is designed to put a college degree within the reasonable

reach of all combat veterans who have served since 9/11. Why is it so important?

“Veterans who spend four years at a public school will end up with \$16,000 of debt. Private school debt can be greater than \$70,000. For Reservists and National Guardsmen, those numbers increase to up to \$44,000 for public school and \$100,000 for private school.”

**Comparative Cost of the New GI Bill
(Billions of Dollars)**



Iraq Data: <http://usgovinfo.about.com/library/weekly/aairaqwarcost.htm>; Agricultural Data: <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Agriculture/bg2134.cfm>

1.) The New GI Bill will help recruit and retain America's best and brightest. Modern military missions call for troops who can learn new languages and understand foreign cultures. This means the U.S. Armed Forces will need to attract recruits who have an interest in learning. Offering a college education in return for service is an ideal way to bring bright minds into the military. The ability to afford a college degree has already helped draw countless men and women into the Armed Forces. The New GI Bill will tap into that desire, boost recruitment and retention, and help persuade a new generation of America's best and brightest to serve their country.

2.) The New GI Bill will create the leaders of tomorrow. Beneficiaries of the original GI Bill – which provided free tuition, books, and a living stipend to nearly eight million World War II veterans – have gone on to become cultural luminaries and great statesmen. Presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush received benefits under the first GI Bill, as did Senators Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Bob

Unless otherwise noted, data courtesy of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Quick Facts and Full Issue Report, <http://www.gibill2008.org/about.html>. Debt calculations based on that and data from The Fund for Veterans Education, http://www.veteransfund.org/did_you_know.php



Dole. Authors Joseph Heller, Norman Mailer and Frank McCourt also number among recipients of original GI Bill dollars. The message is clear: an educational benefit for veterans today creates leaders and visionaries for tomorrow.

Early opponents of the New GI Bill, such as President Bush and John McCain, claim that it would harm retention rates. The following veterans organizations disagree:

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)
 The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
 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 Partnership for Veterans' Education

3.) The New GI Bill will act as an investment in America's future. According to a 1988 congressional study, every dollar spent on the original GI Bill added \$7 to the national economy in increased productivity, tax revenue and consumer spending. The New GI Bill should produce similar results. At an annual cost of only \$2.5-\$4 billion – approximately what we spend in Iraq *per week* – the New GI Bill is an investment whose dividends we will enjoy for decades to come.

4.) The New GI Bill will make college affordable. Active duty service members who pursue a four year degree at a public school now finish college with approximately \$16,000 of debt. Veterans who make it into America's most prestigious private universities will come out of college four years later with more than \$70,000 of debt. Reservists and National Guardsmen, some of whom have served multiple combat tours, fare even worse: up to \$44,000 of debt for public school and \$100,000 for private school. The New GI Bill will help keep active duty service members and activated reservists and guardsmen out of debt by tying benefits to costs, creating a new provision to make private school tuition more affordable and providing a monthly stipend for housing costs. Our veterans have already dodged bullets. They should never have to dodge creditors.

5.) The New GI Bill will make it easier for veterans to receive their full benefits. Veterans pay a nonrefundable \$1,200 contribution to be eligible for

educational benefits. Yet less than 10% use their full benefit and 30% don't use it at all. These veterans have contributed \$230 million to the national treasury in the hopes of attaining a college degree, but have received nothing in return. While the mere cost of college scares many veterans away from using their benefits, processing delays and paperwork battles are also to blame. By providing upfront tuition assistance and lengthening the amount of time veterans have to use their benefits, the New GI Bill will restore the promise of college affordability.

6.) The New GI Bill will help veterans readjust to civilian life. Hundreds of thousands of veterans are returning home with grave problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder. The workplace is hardly an ideal setting for coping with the difficulties of starting civilian life anew, especially if one is recovering from war. By helping veterans go to college, the New GI Bill will ease veterans back into civilian life instead of throwing them directly into a volatile marketplace.

In 1996 Senator John McCain spoke of "Americans who fought in the Second World War [and] came home to the GI Bill and a booming economy. They immediately began building prosperous lives and a better nation. They used their opportunities to create greater opportunities for other Americans."

Unfortunately, presidential candidate John McCain has come out against creating a New GI Bill for the 21st Century. Such a stance is unacceptable. The 1.5 million troops that have served in Iraq and Afghanistan have earned the opportunity that education brings. The New GI Bill will make that opportunity a reality.

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