

GI Bill Improvements

VFW's Concerns:

Recently, ITT Technical Institute and Westech College suddenly shuttered their doors after losing accreditation. This left thousands of student veterans out of school mid-semester, with no plan for what to do the rest of the term. They had lost weeks or months of GI Bill benefits that were wasted at failed institutions. Even worse, they lost the monthly housing stipend many relied upon for their living situation. Student veterans who attended schools like ITT have now lost those months of GI Bill eligibility and they have no credits to show for it. The VFW has heard from student veterans from the closed schools, and they are now struggling to complete their degrees without their previous credits.

At the request of the Department of Defense (DOD), Congress provided DOD the authority to involuntarily mobilize National Guard and Reserve service members for deployments in support of preplanned missions and enable Guard and Reserve service members to remain on active duty to recover from injuries they have sustained during their service. However, Congress failed to ensure service members involuntarily mobilized under these new authorities are granted the same benefits and services as other Guard and Reserve service members who are called to serve on active duty, including eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits. More than 25,000 Guardsmen and Reservists have been activated without the same benefits as their active duty counterparts.

For the past decade and a half, our country has been sending Guardsmen and Reservists into harm's way at an unprecedented level, and some of them have been wounded in the line of duty. Nearly 3,000 of these Citizen Soldiers have bled for this country, but have not accrued enough active duty time to attain full GI Bill benefits.

The Marine Gunnery Sergeant John D. Fry Scholarship gives 100 percent GI Bill benefits to the children and spouses of service members who gave their lives serving our country. While this is a great benefit for the families of the fallen, it does not cover the full cost of attending private institutions of higher learning. The Yellow Ribbon Program was created to bridge the gap so veterans would not have to pay any out-of-pocket costs to achieve their educational goals. Fry Scholarship recipients are not eligible for the Yellow Ribbon Programs.

VFW's Solutions:

Congress must pass H.R.3218, the *Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act*. This important bill would:

- Ensure all student veterans using GI Bill benefits have their benefits restored when the school they are attending is abruptly closed, similar to their civilian counterparts using Department of Education programs.
- Expand the VA Yellow Ribbon Program to the dependents of veterans who die in the line of duty, thus helping them achieve their educational goals.
- Grant full GI Bill eligibility to Purple Heart recipients regardless of their time on active duty.
- Ensure Guardsmen and Reservists who are called to active duty receive the same benefits as their active duty counterparts.