

President Signs New GI Bill Into Law

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — President Bush's signature today on a new GI Bill for the 21st Century is being hailed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. as a tremendous victory for a new generation of military servicemen and women who have been at war for almost seven years.

"This is a tremendous victory for America's veterans, military and their families," exclaimed VFW national commander George Lisicki, a Vietnam combat veteran from Carteret, N.J.

"I salute Sen. Jim Webb (D-Va.) for his determination to get this bill passed, the president for his strong support of our military, and the entire VFW membership for their untiring effort to get their congressional delegations to cosponsor S. 22 or its companion bill in the House, H.R. 5740."

The new 21st Century GI Bill will pay the highest in-state public tuition rate, and provide for books, fees, and a living stipend. It eliminates the \$1,200 enrollment fee, extends the use-or-lose benefit requirement from 10 to 15 years, and greatly enhances the amount paid to Guard and Reserve members. The new GI Bill automatically adjusts itself as tuitions increase, and provides a dollar-for-dollar tuition match for private colleges and universities who choose to participate in the program. A new provision added to the bill also allows reenlisting servicemembers to transfer their educational benefit to their spouse and/or children.

The VFW fought doggedly for more than a decade to bring an expanded GI Bill into reality. Lisicki said the long-awaited victory would not have been possible without strong bipartisan support in Congress, the dedicated staff work and grassroots lobbying efforts of the VFW Washington Office, VFW Legislative Committee members, VFW Action Corps, and the entire VFW and Auxiliary membership of 2.3 million.

In 1944, the VFW also played a leading role to shape and bring to fruition the original World War II GI Bill, which is widely regarded as one of the most significant pieces of legislation enacted in the last century. Almost half of the 16 million men and women who served in World War II took advantage of the education benefit, and they returned to federal coffers \$7 for every \$1 dollar spent on their education in the form of higher taxes paid on the higher wages earned.

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"Now, 64 years later, the VFW is proud to once again play a key role in the development and passage of a new GI Bill," said Lisicki, "because it's just one more shining example of the VFW fulfilling its mandate of service to others by backing the right piece of legislation that will have the most significant impact.

"Our voices – united toward a common cause – urged America's leaders to reward the gift of education to the men and women who protect our great country," he said. "This is why the VFW is just as relevant today as we were 109 years ago when we were founded. We make a difference."