

Senator Jim Webb

Committee on Veterans' Affairs

May 9, 2007

Regarding Pending Veterans' Benefits Legislation

### Opening Remarks

I am pleased that this Committee is considering so many pieces of worthwhile legislation. Among those bills, I would like to discuss the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2007.

As a veteran who hails from a family with a long history of military service, I am proud to have offered this bill as my first piece of legislation in the United States Senate on January 4 of this year.

This bill has ten cosponsors and is supported by the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS), the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), and the Air Force Sergeants Association. Moreover, the written testimony of many of today's witnesses indicates further broad support for this bill.

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2007 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.

Most of us know that 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 G.I. bill program was designed to help veterans readjust to civilian life, avoid high levels of unemployment, and give veterans the opportunity to receive the education and training that they missed while bravely serving in the military.

The post-World War II G.I. bill paid for veterans' tuition, books, fees, and other training costs, and also gave a monthly stipend. After World War II, 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.

Let me briefly summarize some of the reforms that are contained in the bill I am introducing today.

First, these increased educational benefits will be available to those members of the military who have served on active duty since September 11, 2001. In general, to qualify, veterans must have served at least two years of active duty, with at least some period of active duty time served beginning on or after September 11, 2001.

This legislation also includes those who have served in the Reserve and National Guard. Those who have an aggregate total of 24 months active duty since 9/11 will be eligible for month for month education benefits. Those in the Reserve and National Guard who have been on active duty for 36 months or more will be eligible for the whole benefit.

Next, the bill provides for educational benefits to be paid for a duration of time that is linked to time served in the military. Generally, veterans will not receive assistance for more than a total of 36 months, which equals four academic years.

Third, as I mentioned a moment ago, my bill would allow veterans pursuing an approved program of education to receive payments covering the established charges of their program, room and board, and a monthly stipend of \$1,000. Moreover, the bill would allow additional payments for tutorial assistance, as well as licensure and certification tests.

Fourth, veterans would have up to fifteen years to use their educational assistance entitlement. But veterans would be barred from receiving concurrent assistance from this program and another similar program, such as the Montgomery G.I. bill program.

Finally, under this bill, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs would administer the program, promulgate rules to carry out the new law, and pay for the program from funds made available to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the payment of readjustment benefits.

Again, I note that the benefits I have outlined today essentially mirror the benefits allowed under the G.I. bill enacted after World War II. That bill helped spark economic growth and expansion for a whole generation of Americans. The bill I introduce today likely will have similar beneficial effects. As the post-World War II experience so clearly indicated, better educated veterans have higher income levels, which in the long run will increase tax revenues.

Moreover, a strong G.I. bill will have a positive effect on military recruitment, broadening the socio-economic makeup of the military and reducing the direct costs of recruitment.

Perhaps more importantly, better-educated veterans have a more positive readjustment experience. This experience lowers the costs of treating post-traumatic stress disorder and other readjustment-related difficulties.

The United States has never erred when it has made sustained new investments in higher education and job training. Enacting the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2007 is not only the right thing to do for our men and women in uniform, but it also is a strong tonic for an economy plagued by growing disparities in wealth, stagnant wages, and the outsourcing of American jobs.

I am a proud veteran who is honored to serve this great nation. As long as I represent Virginians in the United States Senate, I will make it a priority to help protect our brave men and women in uniform.