

EDITOR'S NOTE: Sen. Cardin writes periodic columns for Maryland publications. The following column about legislation to improve educational opportunities for veterans may be of interest to your readers. Please contact Susan Sullam at susan_sullam@cardin.senate.gov if you have any questions.

PRECEDDE: Senator Cardin is a member of five committees: Foreign Relations, Judiciary, Environment and Public Works, Budget and Small Business. His web site is: cardin.senate.gov

WE NEED TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS FOR VETERANS By U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

Congress passed the original GI Bill in 1944 to help veterans returning home from World War II adjust to civilian life through education and training. But the legislation has been credited with much more than educating a generation of Americans; many believe it served as an economic catalyst that helped transform our nation in the second half of the 20th Century.

Since the first GI Bill expired in 1956, educational benefits have not kept pace with escalating college costs. Today, the maximum educational benefit allowed is approximately \$9,900 a year, with the average veteran receiving about \$6,000 for this year.

It does not keep up with the growing costs of a college education in this country. For example, the cost of in-state tuition and room and board at the University of Maryland, College Park, easily exceeds \$20,000 a year.

We have got to do better for our veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, many of whom have been engaged in a new kind of war that often requires extended tours of duty and repeated deployment of Reservists and National Guard troops. Congress must ensure that GI educational benefits meet the needs of this generation of veterans, many of whom signed up to defend our nation after the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

To help meet this obligation, I have co-sponsored the *Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act*, S. 22, which is designed to give our returning troops quality educational benefits that are comparable to the benefits provided to World War II veterans.

This new bill would include the full cost of in-state tuition plus a monthly stipend for living expenses for members of the Armed Services who have served on active duty since 9/11. It also would allow veterans up to 15 years to use their educational benefit, and it would provide additional payments for tutorial assistance and licensure and certification tests.

To qualify for the new benefits, veterans must have served at least two years on active duty, with at least some period of that time beginning on or after 9/11. The legislation does extend benefits to members of the Reserves and National Guard. Generally, veterans

will not receive assistance for more than a total of 36 months, which equals four academic years.

The original GI Bill allowed our World War II veterans to achieve their dreams and helped to spark an economic boom for a whole generation. This new educational assistance for veterans can do the same for our country in the 21st Century by providing veterans with the skills and training they need to succeed in today's economy. It's time we fulfill our promise to support our current veterans just as we did for their parents and grandparents who defended our great nation.

--##--

4/08