

The GI Bill

Harry W. Colmery, a former national commander of the American Legion and former Republican National Chairman, is credited with drawing up the first draft of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, now known as the GI Bill. It was introduced in the House on Jan. 10, 1944, and in the Senate the following day. It was signed into law by President Roosevelt on 22 June 1944. Colmery said "*Never again do we want to see the honor and glory of our nation fade to the extent that her men of arms, with despondent heart and palsied limb, totter from door to door, bowing their souls to the frozen bosom of reluctant charity.*" His reference was to the rather poor way we treated our Veterans following WWI.

The 10 key ingredients of the original GI Bill were educational opportunity, vocational on-the-job training, readjustment allowances, home, farm and business loans, review of discharges, adequate health care, prompt settlement of disability claims, mustering-out pay (removed from the bill after it was enacted separately), effective veteran employment services, and concentration of all veterans functions in the Veterans Administration.

Since 1944, Congress passed several Acts authorizing additional benefits under the GI Bill. In 1952, legislation authorized benefits for our Korean War Veterans. The Veterans Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966 extended benefits to Veterans who served during times of war and peace. Payments for single (unmarried) Veterans were \$100 per month and the Veteran had to pay all college expenses; tuition, fees, books and living expenses. It was not enough so most of us worked part-time jobs. It was a great incentive to attend college, however, and allowed me to earn a Bachelors and Masters degree. Usage by Vietnam Veterans was about 25%, much lower than earlier usage. In 1947, 19% of the college students were Veterans. In 1973, at MSUM there were 573 students using the GI Bill. My 1979 Masters' thesis research concluded that student receiving GI Bill aid did as well academically as students who received grant aid. However the high school grades and rank of the GI Bill students was significantly lower than the grant aided students. Or in simpler words, those who served in the military did not do as well in high school as those who went directly to college. Once they returned to college, they did as well as anyone else.

Following the establishment of the all-volunteer force in 1973, the GI Bill changed to include National Guard members, providing the opportunity to contribute to the GI Bill while on active duty and proving an option to transfer unused portions of the GI Bill to a spouse or child. Not all changes were fully supported by Congress. In 2003, while I was president of a National organization of college representative who worked with Veterans, we met with both House and Senate committees and pleaded with them to include Veterans benefits when authorizing funds for war. We were told "there is not enough money".

The Return on Investment of the GI Bill has been positive with the extra income earned and extra Federal taxes paid. I saw one site that calculated the return on \$1 invested at \$6.90.