

Reps. Murphy and Courtney Call on President to Support New GI Bill for 21st Century

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HARTFORD, CT - Today, Representatives Chris Murphy (CT-05) and Joe Courtney (CT-02) urged President Bush to support a new federal GI Bill to restore the promise of a full, four-year college education, and make the veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan part of an American economic recovery, just as the veterans of World War II were.

"For all they have given to us, and all we have asked of them, providing our returning troops with the tools they need to return to their civilian lives is the least we can do for their service. A GI Bill that meets the needs of our veterans and addresses twenty-first century challenges is one way to honor their service," stated Courtney.

"As we ask more and more from our soldiers and their families, it's only right that we provide them a proper benefit to continue on the course to success when they return home. This new GI Bill keeps our promise," said Murphy.

Yesterday, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 5740, the Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, 256-166. Despite overwhelming bipartisan support for this bill in both the House and the Senate, the President has threatened to veto this common sense update to the existing GI Bill.

Today, veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan receive educational benefits that cover only about 60 percent of a public college education and 30 percent of a private college education. Under the new GI Bill, service members returning from Iraq or Afghanistan who have served 3 years on active duty, would receive benefits to cover the costs of a four-year education up to the level of the most expensive in-state public school (\$9,338 for next year in Connecticut), along with a stipend for housing, books and other expenses.

Education benefits would be available to troops who have served at least 3 months of active duty service since September 11, 2001, including members of the National Guard and Reserve, who make up 25% of our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Currently, National Guard and Reservists are not granted the same level of benefits as other service members.

The original GI Bill launched millions of families on a course of prosperity -and set the American economy on the right course after a draining war. It made a free college education available to more than 15 million war veterans after World War II. By 1956, about 8 million World War II veterans took advantage the GI Bill education and job training. Every dollar spent on the original GI Bill created a seven-fold return for the economy.

"The brave men and women serving abroad have put their lives on hold to serve their country. While they have been gone, the cost of a college education has only gone up. Investing in this generation of soldiers will not only enrich their lives, but help our economy," said Murphy.

"As our troops return, they will be faced with many challenges, including an economy that has stalled, energy costs that continue to skyrocket, and college costs that are through the roof. Enacting a new GI Bill that helps our troops build a better life for themselves when they return is simply the right thing to do," added Courtney.

The new GI bill is supported by all major veterans' organizations, including the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

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