

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN WARNER (R-VA)
ON THE REVISED GI BILL PROPOSAL (S. 22)
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Mr. WARNER. I thank my colleague.

Mr. President, I have looked forward to this moment. This is a special day for me in many respects. But, first and foremost, what a privilege it is to stand on this floor with three magnificent combat veterans--my colleague and dear friend of 35 years, *Jim Webb*; *Frank Lautenberg* of New Jersey, and my good friend from Nebraska, *Chuck Hagel* -- all of these three gentlemen are combat veterans. Two were awarded the Purple Heart. My military career was far more modest.

I would also like to thank the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, particularly its chairman and ranking member Senator *Akaka* and Senator *Burr* for their leadership on behalf of our veterans. I look forward to working with them on this initiative.

And finally I just want to say thank you to all who have been working on this bill, particularly to *Jim Webb*, who led the effort, drawing on his experience as a young marine officer in Vietnam; as Assistant Secretary of Defense, explicitly assigned to the affairs of the Reserve and Guard units; and then in a position that we both shared as Secretary of the Navy. All of that experience he draws on to bring forth this bill and to lead this effort. Your career in the Senate, I think, will be marked by many successes, but this will be one of the foundations of that success. I say to my colleague that you will always look back upon this accomplishment with a humble sense of pride knowing that you "led the charge."

I am very optimistic that we will prevail with this legislation. There may be challenges, but we will prevail. We will prevail because it is the right thing to do.

I also want to say thank you to my country that gave me an education, for my modest periods of service in World War II in the Navy and service in the Marines during the Korean war. It was not as valorous as the careers of the sponsors and cosponsors joining in this debate.

Mr. President, I am grateful to have been the recipient of two GI bills and I wouldn't be standing here today--it is as simple as that, had it not been for the GI bill. Three months after I was discharged from the Navy, my father died. He was a very wonderful, successful medical doctor. He had served in World War I in the trenches in France as a medical doctor, caring for the wounded. I mention that only because I am not sure I would have had the means within our family structure to go on and receive higher education without the GI bill.

The original GI Bill of Rights was enacted in 1944, and in successive Congresses they made changes to it. But the key to the bill that the two of us from World War II--Senator *Lautenberg* and myself--is that our group of veterans could go to any college or university of his choice, subject to academic or admission requirements. I want to repeat that. There wasn't a college or university in the United States to which they could not attend, for the GI bill covered the full tuition costs of all institutions of higher education. Today's GI bill, largely through the efforts of Sonny Montgomery, a dear friend whom we all value, simply does not have the financial provisions to enable young men and women of this generation to go to any campus they desire. There are low caps on the amount of tuition the current GI bill will cover. And so we have carefully structured in this bill the opportunity for institutions of higher learning to step up and share in this program.

I would like to briefly outline the sharing provision. Under this legislation, the full basic educational benefit will allow GIs who have honorably served to have the full cost of tuition covered at any public college or university in their home State of residence. Veterans will also be given a monthly stipend tied to the Department of Defense's geographic rate for housing, and a small stipend for books. For veterans who choose to attend a private college or university--or an out-of-State public college or university--admittedly, this basic benefit might not cover the full costs of tuition. Thus, this bill will

provide an educational enhancement for veterans who complete at least 36 months of honorable active duty service. The Federal Government will match – dollar for dollar – any additional financial contributions private and public colleges and universities voluntarily contribute toward their respective tuition costs. We believe that many institutions of higher learning will participate in this concept, thus vastly increasing the educational choices for veterans, commensurate with the choices that World War II veterans received.

Mr. President, we talk a lot about academic freedom. It is one of the most cherished things we have in this country. It is a part of the fundamental system of higher education. With that academic freedom, from campuses all across this country, have come great ideas, great inspiration, and solutions which have helped this Nation structure itself as the strongest and most powerful in the world today. But that academic freedom comes at a price. And much of that price is borne by the young men and women today of the all-volunteer force who go forward, raise their right hand, and assume all the risks associated with military service and preserving our freedom.

Educators should stop to think about that. It is important that institutions of higher learning, when possible, have as a part of a student body, young men and women who have proudly worn the uniform of this generation. And this bill puts forward a financial structure for the sharing of tuition costs. I was privileged to go to two schools in my State: Washington and Lee University and the University of Virginia. One a private institution, the other a public institution. But most of the private institutions today, fortunately because of their extraordinary standing and achievements, have tuition rates which cannot be met by a GI completing honorable service and relying on the current GI bill tuition caps.

This bill enables a voluntary, I repeat voluntary, cost sharing between the U.S. Government and the academic institution. I think we owe no less to the preservation of academic freedom at these schools, that freedom being guarded by the young men and women who seek admission, and who have honorably served this Nation. Therefore, if a GI has the requisite academic credentials for admission – we are not asking that any special exception or deviation should be done by these schools.

These valiant men and women deserve nothing less than our full measure of support and unending gratitude for their service and sacrifice. A GI bill for the 21st century, to provide educational benefits for uniformed personnel who are sacrificing so much to preserve our freedom, is the least we can do.

So in closing, Mr. President, I say thank you. I have so much, individually, to be thankful for. Simply stated, I would not be a U.S. Senator today had it not been for the GI bill of World War II and Korea. I want the same opportunity for the current and future generations of “fighters for our freedom.”

I yield the floor.

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