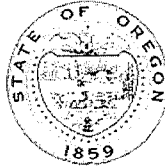


PAUL L. EVANS
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

June 2, 2015

Senator Betsy Johnson, Co-Chair
Representative David Gomberg
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Co-Chairs Johnson and Gomberg:

Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development: I ask for your support of House Bill 2840. This bill will establish an Oregon Educational and Workforce Development Bridge Loan Program within the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs – it is a “gap-filler” targeting educational and training program completion for veterans accessing the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Unlike other educational aid programming (within ODVA) this program is designed to supplement the federal GI Bill structure. The Post-9/11 GI Bill passed by Congress in 2007 was the most comprehensive update to the historic “Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944.” It largely replaced the 1970/80s era Montgomery GI Bill and expanded workforce preparation beyond “the college experience” mirroring the original 1944 program.

Unfortunately, the “Great Recession” caused a constraining of the GI Bill program within the US Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the program cut several critical elements including the so-called “break period” coverage, reduced non-tuition fees, and cost of living adjustments. As a whole, this reduction has generated negative consequences including significant reductions in program completion by GI Bill recipients. Many veterans depart the final phases of training because of a lack of resources.

HB 2840 is a targeted piece of legislation: it will apply only to GI Bill recipients enrolled in a program and on a path toward completion. Recipients will be eligible for one “bridge period” under current funding, and will be expected to complete their educational and/or training program prior to being considered for possible loan repayment reductions. When implemented, HB 2840 will provide our returning veterans with the support required for successful preparation for the 21st Century Workplace – and strengthen our nation, state, and communities in the process.

With your help this bill will provide veterans with the tools needed to successfully transition from military service into a meaningful post-service career and life.

Respectfully,

Paul L. Evans
Oregon House of Representatives
District 20

HOW THE G.I. BILL BUILT THE MIDDLE CLASS AND ENHANCED DEMOCRACY

by Suzanne Mettler, Cornell University

Following World War II, the “Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944” – better known as the G.I. Bill – helped returning veterans earn college degrees, train for vocations, support young families, and purchase homes, farms and businesses. Beneficiaries also become more engaged citizens. Compared to veterans who did not use education and training benefits, recipients reported involvements in 50 percent more civic associations and became significantly more politically active. Some joined the Civil Rights movement to expand citizenship for future generations. The G.I. Bill helped make U.S. democracy more vibrant in the middle of the twentieth century.

The Benefits Provided

Help for veterans of U.S. wars started after the Revolution and became very generous for northerners following the Civil War. In such early eras, pensions for the old and disabled predominated. But as World War II came to a close, the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt looked for ways to invest in the nation’s economic future. A nationwide voluntary association, the American Legion, proposed what became the G.I. Bill, and Legion posts pressed Democrats and Republicans in Congress to enact it into law.

Education and training benefits were the most popular parts of the G.I. Bill, claimed by 51 percent of veterans. Some 2.2 million attended college or graduate school, and 5.6 million prepared for vocations in fields such as auto mechanics, electrical wiring, and construction. Veterans could attend any institution that admitted them, using benefits that covered even the costliest tuition and helped support spouses and children. Nearly three of every ten veterans used low-interest mortgages to buy homes, farms or businesses. The economic impact was huge. In 1955, for example, the Veterans Administration backed close to a third of housing starts.

Expanded Opportunity for a Strong Middle Class

Four out of five men born in the United States during the 1920s served in the military, and about half of them used the G.I. Bill for education and training (either right after World War II or after the Korean War, when comparably generous benefits were provided). Prior to 1940, colleges were mostly for the privileged, but the G.I. Bill opened doors to many who were Catholic and Jewish, including rural people, first-generation immigrant offspring, and veterans from working and middle class backgrounds. An example is Richard Colosimo, a son of Italian immigrants who grew up very poor. “My father always told me,” he explained, “Dick, I don’t know how I can ever help you, but get an education: that’s the most important thing.” Thanks to the “magnanimous” GI Bill, he earned college and graduate degrees for a successful career.

Vocational training also led to jobs with middle class incomes and benefits. Sam Marchesi, for instance, left home at age 14 after his father died and went out west to work as a cowhand, sending his earnings back home to his mother to support the family. After the war, he used the vocational and training benefits of the G.I. bill to become a custom builder, declaring “Thank God, the government had the doors open for us.”

National Leaders – and Linchpins of Local Communities

Among those helped by the G.I. Bill are many famous people, including major figures in public life such as Presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush; Supreme Court Justices William Rehnquist, John Paul Stevens and Byron White; U.S. Senators Bob Dole, John Glenn, George Mitchell, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan; and U.S. Representatives Alan Simpson, Ronald Dellums, and Charles Rangel. Civil Rights activists Medgar Evers and Hosea Williams also used the G.I. Bill, as did legendary entertainers Harry Belafonte, Johnny Cash, Clint Eastwood, Paul Newman, and Walter Matthau.

But for every renowned beneficiary, there were tens of thousands of avid joiners and community linchpins. A good example is Luke LaPorta, who never would have attended college without what he called “a hell of a gift, an opportunity, and I’ve never thought of it any other way.” He gave back to society by creating Little League baseball teams all over central New York. Another telling case is Henry Hervey, a black Tuskegee Airman, used benefits to go to college in Chicago, and later joined the Civil Rights movement to “take on City Hall” to fight discrimination.

Lessons for Today

As young adults, members of America’s “greatest generation” saw government make a difference in their lives. Millions used generous, dignified benefits to seize opportunities and becoming more actively engaged citizens. To revitalize U.S. democracy for the twenty-first century, we need to create that same sense of reciprocal obligation between citizens and government. All citizens should be called to do their civic duty – and in return they should enjoy visible, dignified benefits that expand opportunity and enable active citizenship.

Read more in Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (Oxford University Press, 2005).



G.I. BILL

Officially the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, the G.I. Bill was created to help veterans of World War II. It established hospitals, made low-interest mortgages available and granted stipends covering tuition and expenses for veterans attending college or trade schools. From 1944 to 1949, nearly 9 million veterans received close to \$4 billion from the bill's unemployment compensation program. The education and training provisions existed until 1956, while the Veterans' Administration offered insured loans until 1962. The Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966 extended these benefits to all veterans of the armed forces, including those who had served during peacetime.

The G.I. bill, officially the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, provided many benefits to veterans of World War II. It established veterans' hospitals, provided for vocational rehabilitation, made low-interest mortgages available, and granted stipends covering tuition and living expenses for veterans attending college or trade schools. Subsequent legislation extended these benefits to veterans of the Korean War, and the Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966 extended them to all who served in the armed forces even in peacetime.

From 1944 to 1949, nearly 9 million veterans received close to \$4 billion from the G.I. bill's unemployment compensation program. The education and training provisions existed until 1956, providing benefits to nearly 10 million veterans. The Veterans' Administration offered insured loans until 1962, and they totaled more than \$50 billion. The economic assistance provided by the G.I. bill and the Veterans' Administration accelerated the postwar demand for goods and services.

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