Interpreting the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008

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Introduction and Historical Background

The establishment of the GI Bill of Rights was signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 22, 1944. At the time, the GI Bill of Rights was referred to as “The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944”, more commonly known as the GI Bill (“Education and Training”, 2013). The process leading to the establishment of the GI Bill of Rights began after Veterans returned from their service after World War I. After World War I, Veterans who were discharged from their branch of service were awarded a one-time $60 allowance and a train ticket to their destination of choice (“Education and Training”, 2013”). During the Great Depression Congress attempted to assist the Veteran population by intervening and passing the World War Adjusted Act of 1924, more commonly known as the Bonus Act (“Education and Training”, 2013”). The Bonus Act provided a bonus based on the number of days served. A stipulation of receiving the bonus was having to wait 20 years after completion of service. The stipulation was met with a negative backlash from the Veterans which resulted in a group of Veterans marching on Washington, D.C in 1932 to demand full payment of their bonuses. The efforts of the Veterans were met with no success and produced a standoff with U.S. Troops (“Education and Training”, 2013”). The return of millions of Veterans from World War II afforded Congress an opportunity to succeed where they had previously failed in terms of Veterans assistance. Harry W. Colmery, a former national commander of the American Legion and former Republican National Chairman, is credited with producing the first draft of the GI Bill. The GI Bill was introduced in the House on January 10, 1944, and in the Senate on January 11, 1944. Both chambers approved their own versions of the bill (“Education and Training”, 2013). In 1984 the GI Bill was restructured. Former Mississippi Congressman Gillespie Montgomery is credited with refurbishing the GI Bill, which has since been known as the
"Montgomery GI Bill. In 2008 the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 was signed into law. Adding on to the original GI Bill the new law grants Veterans with active duty service on, or after, Sept. 11 2001, enhanced educational benefits that cover more educational expenses, provide a basic allowance for housing, stipend of $1000 each calendar year for books and supplies as well as the ability to transfer unused educational benefits to spouses or children ("Education and Training”, 2013”).

With the combination of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan coming to a close and the availability of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, colleges across the nation are expected to experience an influx of Post 9/11 GI Bill participants. According to the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 Primer and Issues, by fiscal year 2010, the Post 9/11 GI Bill had the largest numbers of participants and the highest total obligations compared to the other GI Bills (Dortch, 2014 pg2). From the dates of August 2009 to December 2013 there was a total of 1.8 million unique claimants who applied for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. This number is comprised of 63% Veterans, 15% Active Duty Service members and 23% dependents (US Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015).

**Description of the problem that Necessitate the Policy/Issue**

Evidence demonstrates that each year from 2007 to 2010 there has been a consistent increase of Veterans filing for unemployment. As of 2013, Veterans under the age of 35 have the highest unemployment rate among Veterans which is 11%, compared to 8% for the non-Veteran population under the age of 35 (“2015 Veteran Economic Opportunity Report”, 2015). Further interpretation of the 2015 Veteran Economic Opportunity Report states 1 out of two separating Post-9/11 Veterans will face a period of unemployment. In contrast, Post-9/11 Veterans are doing better than their non-Veteran peers in earnings. Post-9/11 Veterans attain 11% higher
median earnings than non-Veterans with similar demographic characteristics. With these statistics, it has been determined the Post-9/11 GI Bill is a key strategy to improve Veterans’ and their family’s economic opportunity. Further analysis focused specifically on the female Veteran population suggest female Veterans attain 14% higher median earnings than the non-Veteran female population with similar demographic characteristics (“2015 Veteran Economic Opportunity Report”, 2015). Although significant steps have been made to improve the overall economic competitiveness of Veterans in recent years, federal agencies need to continue coordination to identify and address gaps in current programs and policies that may result in barriers to economic success among vulnerable segments of the Veteran population (“2015 Veteran Economic Opportunity Report”, 2015).

**Policy Description**

Passage of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 in June 30, 2008 increased the educational benefits for all service members who had served more than 90 days on active duty since September 11, 2001 (Dortch, 2014). The previous educational benefit level was defined by the Montgomery GI Bill. The policy provides benefits designed to meet four main objectives. The first objective is to provide parity of benefits for reservists and members of the regular Armed Forces. The second objective is to ensure comprehensive educational benefits. The third objective is to meet military recruiting goals, and the fourth objective is to improve military retention through transferability of benefits (Dortch, 2014). Under the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, Veterans and service members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard may be eligible. Individuals must serve an aggregate minimum of 90 days on active duty after September 10, 2001, or individuals must have been
discharged or released for a service connected disability after serving a minimum of 30
continuous days on active duty after September 10, 2001 (Dortch, 2014).

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 provides eligible persons an
entitlement to educational assistance. This entitlement is measured in time, specifically months
and days. The entitlement period is 36 months

Eligible programs of education supported by the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational
Assistance Act of 2008 are as follows. Courses at an educational institution that lead to a
predetermined educational, vocational, or professional objective or objectives if related to the
same career. This includes traditional undergraduate and graduate programs. Courses required by
the Administrator of the Small Business Administration as a condition for obtaining financial
assistance under the provisions of the Small Business Act. Licensing or certification tests for a
predetermined vocation or profession, provided such tests and the licensing or credentialing
organizations or entities that offer such tests are approved; courses offered by a qualified
provider or entrepreneurship courses; national tests for admission to institutions of higher
learning (IHL) or graduate schools; national tests providing an opportunity for course credit at
IHLs such as the Advanced Placement (AP) exam; a preparatory course for a test that is required
or used for admission to an institution of higher education or a graduate school; full-time
programs of apprentice or other on-the-job training; cooperative programs; refresher, remedial,
or deficiency courses; preparatory or special education or training courses necessary to enable
the individual to pursue another approved program of education; and a course for which the
individual is receiving the Tuition Assistance from Department of Defense (DOD) (Dortch,
2014). The following information is specific to non-active duty individuals in programs of
education leading to a degree. Individuals can receive a books and supplies stipend of up to
$1000 per year. Individuals can also receive a monthly housing allowance which is rated as E-5 paygrade with dependents in the military (Dortch, 2014).

**Objective Analysis (Goals and Feasibility)**

As previously mentioned in the policy description section of this paper, there are four main objectives the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 were designed to meet. According to The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 Primer and Issues, the four objectives are (1) provide parity of benefits for reservists and members of the regular Armed Forces, (2) ensure comprehensive educational benefits, (3) meet military recruiting goals, and (4) improve military retention through transferability of benefits (Dortch).

Following the enactment of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, there have been laws passed to amend programmatic aspects of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The amendments include the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2009; the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010; the Restoring GI Bill Fairness Act of 2011; the Honoring America’s Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012; and the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 (Dortch, 2014). According to the 2015 Veteran Economic Opportunity Report, Veterans ages 18-34 the unemployment rate was 20% higher than the unemployment rate for non-Veterans. Comparatively, Veterans under the age of 30 participating in the Post-9/11 GI Bill program complete at an 8% higher rate compared to traditional college students. Veterans under the age of 35 also earn at least 6% more than their non-Veteran counterparts. These observations highlight the facts of Veterans having the higher unemployment rate however the Veterans who utilize the Post-9/11 educational benefits and attend school are faring well.

**Arguments in Favor/Against of Issue (Identification of Legislators, Organizations, Groups)**
In January 2007, Senator Jim Webb (D-VA) introduced the “Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2007”, which would have provided educational benefits that paralleled those of the post-World War II GI Bill. On February 28, 2008, Webb unveiled a revised bill that made a number of changes designed to reduce its cost. A companion bill, H.R. 5740, was introduced in the House by Rep. Harry Mitchell (D-AZ) on April 7, 2008. In introducing the revised measure, Webb and the principal cosponsors of the legislation which included Senators Chuck Hagel (R-NE), John Warner (R-VA), and Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) discussed the bill on the Senate floor where the following statement was pronounced, “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. . . . Today's GI Bill . . . simply does not have the financial provisions to enable young men and women of this generation to go to any campus they desire. . . . And so we have carefully structured in this bill the opportunity for institutions of higher learning to step up and share in this program”.

(Congressional Record, S1352, 2008).

Opponents of the Post-9/11 GI Bill included former President George W. Bush, at the time President, the Pentagon and Senator John McCain, a then-presumptive nominee for president who is also arguably the nation’s most respected voice regarding veterans’ affairs. For years, bills expanding GI Bill benefits have been introduced unsuccessfully in Congress. A brief survey of the political climate in early 2008 would lead one to believe that such an act would have virtually no chance of passage, due to the firm opposition (Keillor, 2009). The focal point of the initial opposition to the bill by the administration, the Pentagon, and
Senator McCain was a concern the granting of benefits would entice large numbers of experienced personnel away from the military services during a time of war (Keillor, 2009). Another considerable basis of opposition was a critique of markedly expanded entitlement spending without paying for it, since leading versions of the bill did not offer corresponding tax increases or spending reductions in other areas to help compensate the amount of spending (Keillor, 2009).

**Communications with Legislators from Primary Parties**

Discussions concerning the effect and implementation of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 were discussed with Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr and Senator Jose Rodriguez, both of which who serve on the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs & Military Installations. Inquiries of the negative and positive effects of the continuance of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 were posed to Senators Lucio Jr and Rodriguez. Senators Lucio Jr and Rodriguez both stated they were not familiar with the negative or positive effects of the GI Bill, however they were both open to any and all information that student veterans had to offer.

**Petition & Rally Efforts**

Concerning the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, a group of six Tarleton State University (TSU) social work students planned and conducted a rally to bring awareness to issues eligible participants of the Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits may encounter while enrolled at TSU. Organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the American Legion and Pecan Valley Centers Military Volunteer Peer Network program attended and shared insight on how the issues surrounding the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008
Implications for Social Work

Regarding the social work profession the implications caused by the 2008 Veterans’ Educational Assistance Act affects the micro, mezzo and macro levels of social work. Social workers possess the training to assist veterans in obtaining their benefits, as well as assisting with the process of transitioning from the military environment to the civilian environment. The intervention of social workers on the mezzo level can take place on a college campus where transition assistance classes can be conducted. At the mezzo level the social worker will be able to assess the overall situation of a campus as well as locate individuals needing more specific assistance. The macro level assistance would be accomplished by gathering evidence on multiple Universities and community colleges across the nation and determining what barriers are deterring eligible participants from utilizing their benefits to their full capacity.
References


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