Title of Presentation  GI Bill Education Benefits Must be Reformed

Presentation Format (check only one)
Scholarly paper
___ Research findings
___ Research proposal
___ Literature review
___ X Policy analysis
Symposia
___ Research orientation
___ Practice/innovation orientation
___ Demonstration/Research orientation
Marketplace of Ideas
___ Research findings
___ Research orientation
___ Poster Fair/Research orientation
___ Poster Fair/Practice orientation
___ Poster Fair/Research orientation
___ Demonstration/Practice orientation

Abstract: The 1994 G.I. Bill of Rights was perhaps the most significant educational event in the 20th century (Brodinsky, 1999). Millions of World War II GI’s furthered their education through its support, thus changing a generation and its expectations regarding higher education. Today’s GI Bill benefits are a shadow of those of the original bill and can no longer be considered excellent. Congress needs to reconsider its tepid support for GI benefits so that the lives of servicemen and their families can once again be transformed through education.

Introduction/Overview of Policy: The GI Bill (the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act) was enacted in 1944 to provide access to education, housing, and transitional funding for GI’s returning from World War II service. It’s purpose was to defray the return of millions of servicemen into the workforce, but its long-term (and rather unexpected impact) was through education. It was the biggest social welfare bill enacted to date by Congress. Many feel that it was the best deal ever made by Congress (Keister, 1994).

Policy History: Although the GI Bill provided support for returning GI’s in several areas, it was the education benefits that are now best remembered and valued. It reimbursed tuition costs up to $500 per year and provided living allowances up to $120 per month (GI Bill, 1944). This was significant funding at a time when tuition at Harvard was less than $500 per year and a bottle of milk cost 5¢. Approximately eight million people used GI benefits, including 2.25 million who used education benefits (Skocpol, 1997). College enrollment doubled, producing 450,000 engineers and 238,000 teachers (Keister, 1994). Veterans transferred this educational worth to the next generation, thus “synergistically contributing to the collective good of the nation” (Meinhart, 2000, p. 3).

Implementation Process for Today’s GI Bill: Today’s GI Bill (Montgomery GI Bill, 1999) benefits have not kept pace with costs and needs. Benefits are only $528 per month for someone who completes three years of military service, while the estimated monthly cost for a commuter student at a 4-year college is about $1000 (Hardi, 2000). Current benefits factor out to about one quarter of educational costs. The actual implementation of benefits has become more complicated in terms of counting months towards eligibility and types of eligibility.

Policy Analysis and Critique: Increased GI Bill funding is crucial to today’s veterans and to our country. It is fundamental to the concept of an all-volunteer armed forces. The lack of this funding means that veterans may not achieve their fullest abilities and societal contributions (Meinhart, 2000). The military needs members who have attended the nation’s best colleges and obtained advanced degrees who can then fill the top leadership positions of the armed services sectors.

Strengths/weaknesses, Advantages/Disadvantages: A major weakness is that funding is inadequate. Congress has repeatedly underfunded or avoided voting on funding (Davis, 2000). A second weakness is that unused benefits cannot be transferred to spouses or children. This initiative is important because it allows families to acquire education that could not otherwise be afforded since their low pay and frequent moves often preclude their acquiring sufficient assets to cover family education needs. The major advantage of the GI Bill benefits is that these constitute a cornerstone to attracting and maintaining the best possible cadre of volunteers in the military service of our country.

Areas for improvement: Congress needs to fully fund GI Bill benefits, make benefits transferable to families, and make acquisition of benefits easier for GI’s to maximize benefits.