

# **New GI Bill carries different eligibility, benefit**

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 2, 2009 – A series of educational assistance programs administered by the Veterans Affairs Department, commonly called the GI Bill, have helped servicemembers pursue post-secondary learning for decades.

Soon, another program will be added to the mix: The Post-9/11 Veterans Education Bill will be available to qualified individuals Aug. 1.

"We previously administered four major education programs before this bill came along," Keith M. Wilson, VA's education service director, said. "The new Post-9/11 GI Bill has different eligibility criteria [and] pays for different types of training."

The new GI Bill provides three separate types of benefit payments to those who have at least 90 days of aggregate active service after Sept. 10, 2001.

The first type of payment covers tuition and fees equal to what each state's most expensive state-run school charges for in-state, undergraduate study.

In addition, an allowance based on the Defense Department's basic housing allowance for an E-5 with dependents is available as a benefit paid monthly, Wilson said. The housing allowance's dollar amount depends on the location of the school the servicemember or veteran is attending, he added.

The third benefit is a stipend of up to \$1,000 a year for books and supplies.

"Now, each of those payments is subject to the amount of active duty an individual has," Wilson said. Eligible people with 36 or more months of active duty will receive 100 percent of the three payments, he said. Those with less than 36 months of active service will receive a prorated amount.

For example, Wilson said, someone with 90 days to six months of active service qualifies for 40 percent of each of the three types of payments. The benefits increase with an individual's amount of active service, and extend to National Guardsmen and reservists who have at least 90 days of active service.

"Previously the Guard and reserve members didn't really have a stake in the GI Bill per se," he said. "Now, we have one program that covers both the active duty and the Guard and reserves."

For those who incur out-of-state tuition, attend a private school, or want to pursue graduate studies but find their tuition and fees above the cap set by the VA, there's the Yellow Ribbon program.

"The Yellow Ribbon program is a sub-element of the Post-9/11 GI Bill," Wilson said. "The ...

program allows schools to enter into an agreement with VA by which the school will waive up to half of the difference of their tuition and fees charges and what the cap is for that state, and VA will match the amount that the school waives.

"It's basically a supplemental amount of tuition and fees that would be payable to the school," he added.

Wilson said he thinks the voluntary supplemental program has been well received by schools. He cautioned, however, that the VA still has steps to take before any formal agreements between any institution of higher learning and the VA can take place, including finalizing regulations and setting tuition caps.

"So no school, public or private, that would be interested in the Yellow Ribbon program really has enough information yet to make [the decision to participate]," he said.

It remains to be seen, Wilson said, what effect the country's current economic situation may have on the Yellow Ribbon program.

"The important thing to remember is that the Yellow Ribbon program is available to all schools," he said. "[Speculation about] whether or not schools' financial situations are going to impact their participation or not is a little bit premature. They don't have all the information they need from us yet."

More information on the Post-9/11 GI Bill, eligibility, and how this new bill could affect those with service prior to Sept. 10, 2001, is available on the Veterans Affairs GI Bill site or by calling 1-888-GIBILL-1 toll-free. Along with answers to frequently asked questions, visitors to the site will find a link that will allow them to receive updates on the new GI Bill via e-mail as they become available.

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