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# NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

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## REMARKS BY SENATOR BOB DOLE AT PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE COMPREHENSIVE VIETNAM ERA VETERANS EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS ACT OF 1973

ON MARCH 28, 1974, at 1:00 PM

Ladies and gentlemen, I think it is fitting that this press conference be held today, March 28, on the eve of Vietnam Veterans Day. It is appropriate because our topic is one of the most important to Vietnam veterans at this time -- educational benefits.

There are currently many bills before Congress concerning educational benefits for Vietnam veterans. Each of these bills takes a different approach to changing the GI Bill. However, the sponsors of all these bills are in agreement on one thing: the law needs to be improved. Improving educational benefits for Vietnam veterans is the reason why I joined my colleagues here in introducing the Comprehensive Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Benefits Act of 1973.

### Congressional Action Needed

The matter of improving the GI Bill is primarily an issue of changing the law. Although we in the Congress have been slow in passing some essential legislation, I hope that with the widespread support veterans education has received, Congress will move quickly to take a leading role in this area.

As you can see, veterans education is a bi-partisan issue. The widespread support our particular bill has gathered from both sides of the aisle is an indication that it addresses the areas of the law where changes and improvements are needed for veterans in all states. I have recently requested that hearings be held by the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and I hope I will be able to testify to the importance of this bill. The law needs to be changed and the Congress must move quickly and take a leading role in making these improvements.

### A Reference Point

Much has been said by way of comparison of educational benefits for Vietnam vets with those of World War II vets. We don't necessarily need a reference point to see that the Vietnam era GI Bill is inadequate, but many of us are World War II veterans and went to school under the GI Bill after that war. The contrast between the present GI Bill assistance provision and those available under the World War II bill is distressing.

Hundreds of Vietnam veterans from Kansas have contacted me in support of the Comprehensive Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Benefits Act. I have also talked to a number of World War II veterans, whose sons are veterans of the Vietnam conflict. These World War II vets are in an excellent position to compare present educational benefits to the GI Bill of the earlier period. To a man, they have expressed concern that their Vietnam veteran sons are not receiving a fair amount of assistance under the present GI Bill, and certainly nothing comparable to the post-World War II period.

### Measures Needed

I think S.2789, the Comprehensive Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Benefits Act of 1973, makes up for the inadequacies of the present GI Bill. The provisions for making tuition payments, raising the subsistence allowance, extending the 36 month entitlement period where needed, and increasing the eligibility period from 8 to 10 years are major parts of the Act that are



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especially needed. I think enough has been said about these measures but I hope my colleagues in the Senate will give careful consideration to these most important provisions.

#### Impact of the GI Bill

Failure to pass this legislation will mean a continuation of hardships for a large number of veterans in Kansas and across the country. The extension of the eligibility period from 8 to 10 years is vital to the continued education of thousands of Vietnam era veterans. Of the approximately 50,000 veterans in Kansas who are eligible for educational benefits, about one-third will lose eligibility on June 1, 1974, unless this measure is passed.

It is only fair that these vets receive an extension of eligibility since the present GI Bill, when first enacted in 1966, did not provide enough assistance to make it possible for very many veterans to get further education. The subsistence allowance under the GI Bill in 1966 was only \$100 per month. And this was less than Korean veterans were able to receive in 1954.

For this reason it is important to increase the tuition and subsistence payments along the lines proposed by the Comprehensive Vietnam Era Educational Benefits Act of 1973. Many of these men and women who could not afford further schooling earlier now have families and financial commitments. Increasing financial assistance will provide these and also those with marginal jobs the means to get advanced training to improve their career potential.

Counselors and veterans at the universities and schools in Kansas tell me that many Vietnam vets must drop out of school because of their inability to meet financial requirements. Clearly, the only way to resolve this is to increase financial assistance, as provided in our bill.

Of the 70,000 Vietnam era veterans in Kansas, approximately 20,000 have been able to use educational benefits. This leaves 50,000 eligible for assistance. Under the World War II GI Bill over 50% of the eligible veterans received assistance. Of the Vietnam era veterans in Kansas, only about 10,000 are receiving higher education, about 2,000 are receiving training below college level, and 1,000 are in job training or apprenticeship. I believe a greater number of those eligible should be able to receive additional training and the additional assistance provided by this bill would make that possible. Hopefully, many of those who have previously been forced to drop out of school for financial reasons would be able to pick up again where they left off.

#### Special Needs for Viet Vets

Jobs for Veterans, an organization established by the President in 1970, recently published a report which provides some valuable insights into the particular situation for Vietnam veterans. The Vietnam conflict produced more veterans than any other war the country has been involved in except World War II. As explained in the report, these veterans returned to a society which presented them with more economic, social and employment problems than any other group of veterans has faced.

#### Tight Employment Market

Vietnam vets returned to a society where the job market was critically tight. The energy shortage has further aggravated the employment situation. Although it has been over a year since U.S. involvement in the Vietnam conflict ended, veterans of the war are still without jobs. By comparison, World War II vets entered an economy with an expanding job market where advanced planning had been accomplished to provide for the return of veterans.

As the Jobs for Veterans report states, the GI Bill has provided a cushion for veterans being discharged into the job market. However, the report also shows that participation rates are low compared to other post-war periods. Participation rates for vets with serious educational deficiencies are as low as 10 percent. These vets are precisely the ones who have the most difficulty finding employment. The GI Bill needs improvement in order to better facilitate the transition from military to civilian occupation.



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The skill levels in our industrial and mechanized economy are continually rising. An adequate GI Bill is essential to provide veterans with the training necessary for career employment.

#### Social Tensions

As the Jobs for Veterans report and other authorities have indicated, Vietnam veterans have been confronted with social problems unlike veterans of any other period. They have returned to communities largely indifferent to their efforts.

The large population bulge in the age bracket of most Vietnam veterans has added to their readjustment problems. In addition, many employers tend to suspect all Vietnam veterans of having some widely publicized problems, like drug abuse, which have really effected only a few vets. An improved GI Bill would give more veterans an opportunity to better adjust to these tensions and to become more productive members of society.

#### Higher Education Costs

The greatest obstacle to getting an education for most veterans is the high cost. Inflation has been especially severe for those seeking additional training and our bill is primarily oriented toward meeting this need.

The additional expense to taxpayers would be especially well spent. Don Johnson, VA Administrator, has pointed out that the money spent in the World War II program has been returned to the government in the form of additional tax revenues by about 8 times over.

#### Improving VOLAR

The Jobs for Veterans report shows that 30-40 percent of the GI's who are signing up for today's volunteer army (VOLAR) are doing so because of the educational benefits they will be eligible for later. It has been widely publicized that the new volunteer army is having difficulty recruiting an adequate number and quality of soldiers. It is obvious that a better GI Bill would attract a greater number and more highly qualified personnel for the Armed Services. The Comprehensive Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Benefits Act of 1973 will provide the improved assistance. For this reason I hope that my colleagues in the Senate will act favorably on this bill.

So again, the needs are clear. The Comprehensive Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Benefits Act provides a solution. Hopefully, the Senate will be able to act promptly on it. I am sure it would be greatly beneficial, not only to veterans, but indirectly to our society as a whole.

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