

Congressman Larson Announces Legislation to Benefit 21st Century GIs

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WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressmen John B. Larson (CT-01) today joined House Democrats in introducing the GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century, a legislative package designed to provide our men in women in uniform with better protections and improved benefits.

Over 1 million men and women have served to date as part of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, and now is the time for a new GI Bill, said Larson. In 1944, Congress enacted legislation that welcomed soldiers of the Great Generation home with educational benefits, housing loans, medical assistance and college tuition. The federal government similarly honored returning service men and women returning from Korea and Vietnam.

Now, the needs and economic realities of the next generation fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan must be addressed. The New GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century will guarantee homecoming veterans access to education, health care and the opportunity for good jobs and to maintain our military strength by encouraging new recruits to take their place. It restores cuts and adds funding for vital Veterans programs omitted in President Bush's budget plan.

We are indebted to these brave men and women, Larson said. Words of gratitude aren't enough. We have a duty to protect them in battle and at home. We cannot forget the men and women in the National Guard and Reserves who have risked their lives and left their families for long stretches at a time. Their sacrifices should not be repaid by having to fend without decent medical care or a job. Nor should we neglect the families of those who have died or forget those who have been injured.

The New GI Bill would enhance legislation Larson introduced in March to address the increasing retention and recruitment shortfalls faced by the National Guard and reserve.

As Guard and reserve units continue to be called to serve extended tours overseas, our part-time weekend warriors have become full time soldiers. However, Guard and reserve members continue to be treated separately from the active duty counterparts in areas of benefits, pay and deployment - a practice that lowers retention of current members and keeps many potential recruits from signing up.

Larson's bill, the Reserve Pay and Benefits Modernization Act (H.R. 1169), would address a number of critical needs specifically facing America's Guard and Reserve.

Today, Reservists and National Guard members make up 50 percent of the troops in Iraq, with some having served up to three tours of duty. Over the last 2 ½ years, more than 300,000 National Guardsmen and Reservists have been called up while more than 45,000 have had their deployments extended.

“Our National Guard and reserve units are serving a critical role in our missions overseas and homeland defense,” Larson said. “As their role in modern war fighting increases, they deserve the same rights as those they fight along side of, and those they fight for.”

The GI Bill for the 21st Century:

Makes Health Care Accessible and Affordable for Our Veterans

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Improves veterans’ health care.

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Improves mental health diagnosis and treatment for returning soldiers.

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Blocks increases in prescription drug co-payments and enrollment fees for veterans.

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Provides the Benefits Our Veterans Have Earned and Deserve

Ends the Disabled Veterans’ Tax.

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Reduces waiting times on disability claims and expands outreach to veterans.

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Honors the Families of Those Who Made the Ultimate Sacrifice for our Country

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Ends the Military Families Tax.

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Increases survivor benefits for families with minor children.

Strengthens Our Support for Our Men and Women in Uniform

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Provides \$1,000 Bonus for those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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Ensures an adequate number of troops and adequate equipment for our troops.

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Improves military pay for senior enlisted personnel and warrant officers.

Honors Our Debt to Our Servicemen and Women

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Modernizes and enhances the GI Bill Education and Job Training Programs.

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Provides additional funds to assist homeless veterans with employment.

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Protects bonuses and special pay for the permanently injured, and continues combat pay or additional compensation for those recovering from combat injuries.

Improves Benefits for Our National Guard/Reservists

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Expands military health care (TRICARE) for National Guard/Reservists.

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Protects the income of activated National Guard/Reservists.

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Ensures recruitment incentives and bonuses for National Guard/Reservists and improve educational benefits.

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