



# The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 or The “Forever GI Bill”

U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Veterans’ Affairs  
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

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# Agenda

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- History of Post 9/11 GI Bill
- What is the Forever GI Bill?
- How Did We Get Here?
- Major Provisions
- Implementation
- Your Questions

# House Committee on Veterans Affairs



- Chairman Phil Roe
  - Represents 1<sup>st</sup> District of Tennessee
  - Frist elected in 2008
  - Vietnam-era veteran
  - Medical Doctor and OB/GYN

# History of Post 9/11 GI Bill

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- Enacted in 2009 and was modeled after the WWII GI Bill.
- Generous benefit compared to past programs
- First revisions came to the law in 2010 which expanded eligibility and changed tuition and fee structures
- In-state tuition passed in the 2014 Choice Act
- VA estimates that in FY 2019, the Department will pay benefits to over 766,000 beneficiaries at a cost of \$12.1 Billion

# What is the “Forever GI Bill”?

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The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2017 (P.L. 115-48)

- Signed into law by President Trump on August 16, 2017- just 33 days after it was introduced.
- Named in honor of Mr. Harry W. Colmery, former National Commander of The American Legion and author and architect of the WWII GI Bill.
- Contains over 35 different provisions including the “Forever” provision makes certain veteran’s education benefits good for life.
- Provides over \$3 billion worth of new benefits for veterans and survivors, while not adding to the deficit.

# How did we get here? Part I – Policy

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- Ideas for veteran bills typically arise from:
  - Members/staff/constituents
  - Media stories
  - Schools or training programs
  - Veteran Service Organizations (VFW, The American Legion, SVA etc.)
  - Administrative Proposals from VA
- Considerations
  - Sound policy that help veterans
  - Avoid creating unintended consequences or loop holes
  - Equity
  - Cost
    - Mandatory = entitlements and benefits
    - Discretionary = people and processes

# How Did We Get Here? Part II – VSO's

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## Forever GI Bill Timeline:

- Fall 2016 – Initial conversations on provisions with SVA
- January – February 2017 – Chairman Roe's support and VSO meetings and feedback
- February 2017 – Four corners meeting
- March 2017 – Group VSO meetings where package was unveiled
- April 2017 – Subcommittee hearing postponed
- May 2017 – First all VSO meeting
- June 2017 – Tiger Team begins hill meetings
  - Group includes: Student Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, The American Legion, Got Your 6, Vietnam Veterans of America, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), Military Order of the Purple Heart

# Tiger Team

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# How Did We Get Here? Part III – Leg. Action

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- July 13, 2017 – Bill is introduced in House as H.R. 3218
  - Authored by Chairman Roe and co-sponsored by every member of the House VA Committee
  - **Contained 35 provisions from 17 different members of the House**
- July 17, 2017 – House Committee legislative hearing held
- July 19, 2017 – House Committee markup held
- July 24, 2017 – House Passage
- August 2, 2017 – Senate Passage
- August 16, 2017 – Signed by President Trump

# Major Provisions

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Provisions of the bill can be categorized in three improvements areas:

- Veteran improvements
- Active Duty and Guard/Reserve improvements
- Survivor and Dependent Improvements

# Veterans Improvements

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- Eliminated the 15-year delimiting date, which would ensure access to 36 months of GI Bill benefits for life. (Section 112, effective for any active duty discharges after January 1, 2013)
- Provided access to an additional 9 months of GI Bill eligibility (tuition and fees, living stipend, and book allowance) for veterans working towards a STEM degree (at least 3,300 per year). (Section 111, effective Oct 1, 2019 with funding being ramped up to 100 Million gradually in FY 2023)

# Veterans Improvements (cont'd)

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- Provided access to a pilot program that would provide extra benefits beyond the GI Bill to pay for accelerated learning programs, such as coding and IT boot camps. (Section 116, effective Jan 1, 2019 for two year pilot program)
- Protected GI Bill benefits for veterans when a school closes in the middle of a semester (ITT Tech/Corinthian). (Section 109, effective fall 2017)
- Improved VA's IT infrastructure and administrative processes that will improve the quality of approved schools and provide quicker and more accurate claims processing. (multiple sections, most effective Aug 1, 2018)

# Active Duty and Guard/Reserve

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- Provided new eligibility for the Post 9/11 GI Bill for those who served on active duty under section 12304(a), 12304(b), and 12301(h) orders. (Sections 101 and 401, effective Aug 1, 2018)
- Provided full Post 9/11 GI Bill eligibility to all Purple Heart recipients. (Section 102, effective Aug 1, 2018)

# Active Duty and Guard/Reserve (cont'd)

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- Provided eligibility for Yellow Ribbon Program for Active Duty servicemembers (Section 104, effective Aug 1, 2022)
- Improved eligibility for those who have served less than 36 months on qualifying active duty service by eliminating the 40% tier and bumping these individuals up to the 50% tier and making the current 50% tier equal to 60%. (Section 105, effective Aug 1, 2020)

# Survivor and Dependents

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- Provided Yellow Ribbon Program eligibility for Fry Scholarship recipients which allows many to attend private schools for free. (Section 202, effective August 1, 2018)
- Increased the Dependent Education Benefit:
  - The Chapter 35 increase of \$200 more a month (over \$1 billion dollar investment over ten years) was one of the first significant increases to this benefit for decades. VA estimates that in FY 2018 nearly 100,000 dependents and survivors would be positively impacted by this change.(Section 203, effective Aug 1, 2018)

# Provisions that Impact IHL's

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- Changes for School Certifying Officials (SCO)
  - Required training for SCO's (section 305, effective Aug 1, 2018)
  - Reporting fee increase to \$16 per student (section 304, Aug 1, 2018)
- Reporting requirements on student progress and outcomes (section 114, effective March 1, 2018)
- Funding for new IT system improvements (Section 115, effective Oct 1, 2018)
  - Including ability for SCO's to see a student's remaining months of eligibility (section 308, effective Aug 1, 2018)
- Revision of calculation for BAH
  - Based on where student takes the majority of their classes (Section 107, effective Aug 1, 2018)



# Implementation

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- Subcommittee oversight hearing held in December, 2017
- Staff receives regular updates via teleconference with VA.
- Major focus is ensuring that the VA Education Service is provided with the IT funding they need to avoid delays
- Education service has hired 200 temporary employees to help mitigate anticipated delays in processing claims for the the fall semester
- Possible implementation hearing could be scheduled for later this summer.

# FAQ's

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- Why is the eligibility for the “Forever” provision only related to discharges after January 1, 2013?
- What will VA do about implementing section 107 and what do schools do in the meantime?
- How were these changes paid for to be budget neutral?
- Are you concerned that there will be delays this fall?
- What is next for the GI Bill and what are we working on?

# Questions on #ForeverGIBill?

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- Issue, question, or concern?
- Please contact my colleague Kelsey Baron or me at:
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