Eligible veterans able to apply online

WASHINGTON - Veterans eligible for education benefits under the Webb-Mitchell GI Bill are able to apply for benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs online beginning Friday, May 1. Members of the military who have served on active duty since September 11, 2001, including activated reservists and members of the National Guard, receive up to four academic years of education benefits, including stipends for housing and books. Veterans will have up to 15 years after they leave active duty to use their education benefits.

Applicants can apply through an online form at http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-22-1990-ARE.pdf . Payments will be processed beginning August 1.

"We have a responsibility to serve those who bravely served us," Mitchell said. "I'm proud to have sponsored the Post 9/11 GI Bill in the House of Representatives. It will provide more opportunities for our newest veterans. I am glad that Republicans and Democrats were able to come together to make an historic investment in a bill that will open doors for our veterans, strengthen our economy, and help military recruitment."

In April of 2008, Mitchell introduced H.R. 5740, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, where it gained 302 cosponsors in the House of Representatives. The Senate version of the Bill, S. 22, was introduced by Sen. Jim Webb (D-Va.). It passed as part of the FY 2008 Supplemental Appropriations Act on Thursday, June 19, 2008, which cleared the House with a bipartisan vote of 416-12.

Under the legislation:

- Service members, including those returning from Iraq or Afghanistan, can receive up to 36 months of education benefits, including stipends for housing and books.
- Veterans would have up to 15 years after they leave active duty to use their education benefits.
- Veterans would have the ability to use their benefits for program fees, tuition, books and housing.
- Veterans would be able to use the Yellow Ribbon G.I. Education Enhancement Program, in which the federal government will match, dollar for dollar, any voluntary additional contributions to veterans from institutions whose tuition is more expensive than the maximum educational assistance provided under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

- Benefits are applicable for vocational schools and other non-traditional post-secondary educational settings.