

[The Washington Times](#)

Harry Mitchell and Ginny Brown-Waite

The allied victory in World War II created millions of new veterans. They returned home to a grateful but war-weary nation where they faced economic instability and uncertainty.

And yet they went on to form the backbone of what is today known as the Greatest Generation. Perhaps as much as any other factor, one key event - which occurred 14 months before the end of the war - helped to trigger and fuel the prosperity that the Greatest Generation earned.

This historic catalyst was an act of Congress - passed unanimously and signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1945. The new law was called the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, and it awarded unprecedented education benefits to those who served in combat. We now know this legislation as the GI Bill.

Half of the 16 million veterans who returned from the war used their benefits to go to college. This epic investment in knowledge, training and potential helped to spur exponential economic growth and build the American middle class. There's no wonder the GI Bill continues to be regarded as one of the most important pieces of legislation of the 20th century.

Now, more than 60 years later, Congress once again has an opportunity - and we believe, an obligation - to strengthen America's commitment to those who have served in combat.

We are proud to have joined forces as the primary sponsors in the House of Representatives of a bipartisan 21st-century GI Bill that makes an important investment in our military and our economy. Sens. Jim Webb, Virginia Democrat, and Chuck Hagel, Nebraska Republican, have thrown aside party labels to join forces and champion this legislation as well.

A majority of those in both the House and Senate have signed on as cosponsors of the legislation, making it one of the most widely supported pieces of veterans' legislation before Congress.

This new commitment is simple: If you have served at least three months in combat since September 11, we will honor your sacrifice and cover up to four years of a college education, depending on your length of service, plus stipends for books and housing. This benefit would apply to everyone - those on active duty as well as the National Guard and Reserve.

This is an important commitment that reflects the changing dynamic of our military and how we have fought the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the past, our military generally relied on active-duty personnel. In this war, National Guardsmen and Reservists have been critical to our efforts and have served just as valiantly as their active-duty counterparts.

Yet, many of these soldiers remain ineligible for robust education benefits when they return from combat. And without a new GI Bill, they won't achieve parity with those who served the same mission. They took the same risk. They made the same sacrifices. They deserve the same opportunity for success.

The current GI Bill, known as the Montgomery GI Bill, has served a worthy purpose, and has helped hundreds of thousands of Americans earn an education. But it was designed for peacetime service. We believe that as the nature of military service has changed in wartime, so too should benefits for those who volunteer to service.

There is growing bipartisan consensus in Congress that we must work together to improve education benefits for our veterans, and several of our colleagues have offered legislation aimed at meeting those goals. But only this bipartisan legislation creates a more permanent fix by indexing future education benefits to the actual cost of college tuition. Without this bill, college costs will continue to increase and the GI Bill's benefit would run the risk of being outdated within a few short years.

Perhaps the most universal benefit of a new GI Bill is how it would work to strengthen our economy today, and in the future. For every dollar we invested in the World War II GI Bill, we produced seven more in economic growth. That's exactly the kind of boost our economy needs right now.

Our returning soldiers are precisely the kind of top-quality people who can be valuable leaders: disciplined, hard-working individuals who are looking to improve their lot in life and serve their county. We know they can continue to strengthen our country, even after their time in uniform comes to a close.

But they need Congress and the president to act. With our help, today's veterans will get a shot at becoming the next Greatest Generation.

*Rep. Harry Mitchell is an Arizona Democrat. Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite is a Florida Republican.*