

by **Angelique Soenarie**
[The Arizona Republic](#)

Brian Pierce, 29, served two tours back to back in Iraq so that he could save money and earn extra benefits toward his college education.

Two years later, those benefits barely cover tuition, books, supplies and living expenses for the Phoenix native, who is majoring in mechanical engineering at Arizona State University.

But starting Aug. 1 his college benefits will get a boost from a new bill that benefits military who served after Sept. 11, 2001.

On Saturday, military veterans and active duty personnel alike are encouraged to attend a workshop hosted by Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., on the benefits of the Post 9/11 GI Bill at Mesa Community College.

The event, at 1833 W. Southern Avenue, runs from 2 to 4 p.m., and will be held at the student union by the clock tower.

Under the bill, which was signed into law last summer, qualified veterans can receive up to 36 months of education benefits, which includes tuition, housing allowance and \$1,000 for books and supplies. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 2010 budget designated \$2.1 billion in 2009 and \$7.1 billion in 2010 for the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

"We have a responsibility to serve those who bravely served us," said Mitchell, who sponsored the bill and serves on the House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

"Part of that service includes making sure that the tremendous new educational opportunities

afforded by the GI Bill do not get bogged down in red tape, and that veterans and educational institutions that have questions get the information they need."

As of June 2 the Department Veterans Affairs has received 51,000 applications since application were accepted in May. In 2008, Arizona had 541,439 beneficiaries that received education benefits under all Veterans Affairs education programs. The department estimates nationally 441,728 individuals will participate in the Post 9/11 GI Bill for fiscal year 2010.

Depending on the number of applicants, the popular bill could bring as much as \$126 million to Arizona, according a study by the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

Pierce, an inactive reservist of the Marine Corp, currently receives college benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill. He receives \$1,400 a month per academic year, which pays his \$6,682-a-year tuition, \$1,000 for books and supplies and the remaining for living expenses. Pierce supplements other school and living expenses with his savings.

"I am just really glad that they finally got this through," said Pierce, who provided convoy security with the 1st Marine Logistics Group based at Camp Pendleton, Calif. "I've been watching it in senate for a few years, hoping it would go through and I think Sen. (Jim) Web and Congressman Mitchell really help push to get this through and that just shows how much they really care about us."