

By Matt Orlando
[East Valley Tribune](#)

Saturday marks the 65th anniversary of D-Day, the landing and ensuing battle in Normandy that caused more than 10,000 casualties while starting the liberation of Europe from the Nazi regime.

The year 1944 also holds a special meaning for veterans. That was the year the U.S. government adopted the first GI bill, providing benefits for returning World War II veterans.

In tribute to these historical marks, Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., and representatives from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will hold a workshop on Saturday to introduce a new and much improved GI bill.

This new bill, known as the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, was sponsored by Mitchell and Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va. The bill goes into effect Aug. 1 and will extend educational benefits to members of the military who have served on active duty since Sept. 11, 2001, including activated reservists and National Guard members.

New benefits include college tuition and stipends for housing and books for veterans entering school this fall. Also, service members will now be able to transfer some or all of the new benefits to their spouses and children.

Saturday's workshop will be held from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. in the Kirk Student Union at Mesa Community College, 1833 W. Southern Ave. National Guard members and veterans who are unable to attend the afternoon event can attend an abbreviated GI bill workshop earlier the same day from 11 a.m. to noon at the Arizona National Guard headquarters, Russell Auditorium, 5636 E. McDowell Road in Phoenix. Veterans and family members are encouraged to find out more about this educational opportunity by visiting the Web site www.gibill.va.gov.

Come learn about new, improved GI bill

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Too often, the men and women who have honorably served our country are unaware of the benefits available to them. A few years ago, Chandler partnered with the Arizona Department of Veteran Services to bring awareness to our local veterans through a Benefit Expo.

This annual event is held in Chandler during the fall, and dozens of vendors are present to inform veterans and their families about topics like health care and retirement benefits, compensation and vocational assistance as well as educational opportunities and even mortgage funding options.

This year the Benefit Expo will be held in September in conjunction with an annual event held by the governor's appointed Arizona Veterans Advisory Commission.

Additional assistance and counseling is also available through the local chapter of the Arizona Department of Veteran Services here in Chandler. Interested parties can set up appointments by calling (480) 558-2052 or by visiting the office at 3130 N. Arizona Ave.

As a retiree with 30 years of service in the Air Force and Arizona Air National Guard, I value and support efforts to assist fellow service members. We should never forget the sacrifices of those who died in combat and be committed to ensuring that those who have served receive the benefits they need and deserve. I hope to see you in Mesa on Saturday.

Matt Orlando is a member of the Chandler City Council.