

STATEMENT for the RECORD

**Submitted by
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**before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

on

H.R. 1291, the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act

Thursday, May 24, 2001

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

AMVETS is pleased to present written testimony in support of H.R. 1291, the 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act.

AMVETS commends the Subcommittee for its lead in considering H.R. 1291. The bill is a giant step in the right direction. As its title suggests, the bill would enhance the basic Montgomery GI bill benefit on higher education and prepare the way for its improvement into the next century.

H.R. 1291 would increase the rate of basic educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill in three steps over the next three years beginning in 2002. From the current \$650 monthly benefit, the assistance would increase to \$800 per month in 2002, \$950 per month in 2003, and \$1,100 per month in 2004. In order to be eligible for the maximum 36 months of educational benefits, servicemembers must serve for a minimum of three years and agree to pay \$100 per month for the first twelve months (\$1,200) of service. Individuals with two-year service agreements would have their rates adjusted proportionally.

AMVETS supports this important legislation. The Montgomery GI bill has served this nation well since its passage in 1985. However, over the past fifteen years it has failed to keep pace with the ever-increasing cost of higher education. Despite last year's efforts, the program is clearly losing its value.

As veterans advocates, AMVETS believes we require a new model for today's GI bill that is worthy of a nation that values both higher education and veterans. We need legislation like H.R. 1291 that would upgrade the Montgomery GI Bill in line with the current costs of education.

AMVETS recommends, however, that the bill be amended to authorize an automatic annual adjustment of assistance based on the average monthly cost of attending a four-year public college for a non-resident student. Such action serves at least two purposes. First, it would ensure that the benefit remains viable, sufficient to provide veterans the education promised them at recruitment. And, second, it would mean that Congress would avoid having to re-visit this issue every couple years to raise the standard.

In addition, AMVETS recommends the Subcommittee eliminate the \$1,200 payment required for our servicemembers to gain eligibility for educational benefits. As a member of the Partnership for Veterans' Education of over 50 military and veterans organizations, AMVETS believes strongly that veterans earn this benefit through their service in the Armed Forces. They should not have to face an enrollment expense; especially considering the fact no other federal student loan program requires a similar up-front payment.

AMVETS sincerely appreciates the opportunity to submit our viewpoint on these issues. We commend your effort to address this matter, and we look forward to working with you to provide our Armed Service men and women the educational benefits they deserve.