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A Price on Freedom: The Problems and Promise of the Vietnam Era G.I. Bills

Mark Boulton
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Mark Boulton entitled "A Price on Freedom: The Problems and Promise of the Vietnam Era G.I. Bills." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in History.

G. Kurt Piehler, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Mark Boulton
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Abstract

At the end of World War II, the federal government bestowed one of the richest rewards ever given a mass mobilized army in the form of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the G.I. Bill of Rights. The G.I. Bill offered veterans generous loans, education benefits, and unemployment insurance to help them readjust to civilian life. The bill is widely lauded as one of the most important federal acts of the twentieth century. Further G.I. Bills followed for veterans of the Cold War including those who served in Korea and Vietnam. Despite their continued impact on the lives of veterans and on society, the later bills have received very little public or academic attention. No major study examines the later G.I. Bills beyond the World War II generation. This dissertation helps fill that void by examining the political origins of the Vietnam era G.I. Bills of 1966, 1972, and 1974. Specifically, this dissertation explores the debates over veterans' education benefits at the federal level during the Vietnam era.

After the passage of the 1966 G.I. bill, many Vietnam era veterans complained that their benefits fell short of those offered the World War II generation. As a result, the Vietnam era G.I. Bills often get dismissed as a part of a wider pattern of government neglect of the Vietnam veteran. This study provides a context for understanding why the benefits did not, at first, reach the same generous heights as the previous G.I. Bills and challenges the standard narrative that the government abandoned the Vietnam veteran. The government, particularly the Senate, *did* make considerable efforts to improve the Vietnam veteran's benefits. Although a succession of presidents and congressmen limited the government's generosity because of their ideological or economic convictions, numerous increases in the level of funding followed the 1966 bill, making

veterans' benefits far more comparable to those offered World War II veterans. Following the increases, Vietnam era veterans claimed their education benefits in far greater numbers than their World War II predecessors. Because so many Vietnam veterans decided to return to school, this study shows that the G.I. Bill needs to be a central part of their homecoming story.

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Introduction

CONTINUING THE STORY OF THE G.I. BILL

> Were it not for this program, veterans might have found themselves unemployed, standing in a bread line. . . . The GI Bill changed America, it may have changed the world.
>
> Senator Bob Dole

Ever since the passage of the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act, or G.I. Bill of Rights, which offered returning World War II servicemen and women an unprecedented slew of benefits for educational and vocational advancement, as well as home and business loans, no other federal law of the twentieth century has attracted such unqualified and universal praise for its redeeming effects on society. Politicians and historians repeatedly cite the bill's contribution to easing the nation's postwar social and economic pressures and hail its transformative effects on the lives of those that prospered under its beneficence. On the twentieth anniversary of its signing, President Lyndon Johnson praised the G.I. Bill for "increase[ing] the strength of our Nation by enlarging the opportunities of our people." According to Johnson, the bill provided "600,000 engineers and scientists, 360,000 school teachers, and 700,000 business and executive personnel."[1] More recently, historian Jennifer Keane in *Doughboys, The Great War, and The Remaking of America* (2001), describes the 1944 G.I. Bill as "the most sweeping piece of social legislation in American history."[2] Others suggest that the G.I. Bill ranks alongside the Northwest Ordinance and the Homestead Act as the most significant act

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[1] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson*, "Statement by the President on the 20th Anniversary of the G.I. Bill of Rights," June 22, 1964.

[2] Jennifer Keane, *Doughboys, The Great War, and The Remaking of America.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001), x.

ever passed by the government in the promotion of democracy and social equality.[3] As if the title of his book leaves the reader in any doubt of his exalted opinion of the G.I. Bill, Michael J. Bennett in *When Dreams Came True: The G.I Bill and the Making of Modern America* (1996) states, "I feel I cannot overstate the value and meaning of the G.I. Bill. Its sweep was so vast, its impact so particular, that only one conclusion seems self-evident: The bill made a reality of Jefferson's concept of creating independent yeomen."[4] Veterans remember fondly the unexpected bounty that greeted them after their separation from service. Bob Dole, who used his benefits to attend law school before establishing a distinguished record as a congressman and senator for Kansas, recalls, "Were it not for this program, veterans might have found themselves unemployed, standing in a bread line. . . . The GI Bill changed America, it may have changed the world."[5]

Such adulation sets the G.I. Bill as the capstone of the sacred "Good War/Greatest Generation" narrative of World War II. In popular mythology and in many academic studies of the war, America united for one monumental and heroic effort to fight back the dark forces of Nazi totalitarianism and Japanese aggression after suffering a diabolical and underhanded attack in December 1941. After a hard fought victory, the warriors returned home to a grateful nation and joyous parades. As just reward for their effort, the government bestowed on them perhaps the greatest riches ever provided a mass mobilized army in the form of the G.I. Bill. The G.I. Bill then allowed World War II

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[3] Harold M. Hyman, *American Singularity: The 1787 Northwest Ordinance, the 1862 Homestead-Morrill Act, and the 1944 G.I. Bill* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

[4] Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Came True: The G.I. Bill and the Making of Modern America* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's, 1996), x.

[5] Bob Dole, foreword to Milton Greenberg, *The G.I. Bill: The Law That Changed America* (New York: Lickle Publishing, 1997), 8.

veterans to better their lives and created a new generation of leaders and innovators propelling the nation to even greater heights in the postwar years.[6]

This narrative contains much truth. The G.I. Bill did have an enormous impact on the lives of veterans, on higher education, and on the economy. Out of 15.6 million eligible World War II veterans, 7.8 million used their benefits for education and training. Over 2.2 million attended schools at the college level, the remainder received below college education, vocational training, or farm training at a cost to the government of over 14.5 billion dollars. Over 2.3 million obtained the low-interest home loans and approximately 75,000 received the farm or business loans. These provisions helped forestall a widely feared post-World War II economic depression, expanded the home-owning middle class, and forever changed the nature of higher education in the United States.

Despite its undeniable significance, the G.I. Bill remains understudied. Only a handful of monographs exist on the bill. Its brevity notwithstanding, Keith Olson's *The G.I. Bill, Veterans and Colleges* (1974) remains the most comprehensive scholarly study over thirty years after its initial publication. David Ross's *Preparing For Ulysses: Politics and Veterans During World War II* (1969) discusses the legislative origins of the bill. Bennett's *When Dreams Came True* (1996) provides a less academic overview,

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[6] For one of the most recent and popular manifestations of the Good War idea--popularized in Studs Terkel's *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984)--see Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998). For one of the few qualifiers on the success of the G.I. Bill, see David H. Onkst, "'First a Negro . . . Incidentally a Veteran': Black World War Two Veterans and the G.I. Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948," *Journal of Social History* 1998 31 (3): 517-543. Onkst claims that racism and poor administration negated the effects of the G.I. Bill for black veterans in the Deep South.

while Milton Greenberg's *The G.I. Bill: The Law That Changed America* (1997) offers a sanguine reminiscence on the effects of the bill on society and on individuals. Most recently, Mark Van Ells in *To Hear Only Thunder Again: America's World War II Veterans Come Home* (2001) discusses the impact of the G.I. Bill in the wider context of the coming home experience of World War II veterans in the Wisconsin area and Jennifer Keane's *Doughboys* (2001) examines the central role of the World War I generation in the formulation of the bill. As incomplete as the study of the 1944 G.I. Bill remains, the story of later G.I. Bills is even less known.[7]

Most people are aware of the first G.I. Bill passed in 1944. Few are as familiar with the bill that followed in 1952 for Korean Conflict Veterans or the 1966, 1972, and 1974 G.I. Bills—the focus of this study—that followed for Vietnam era veterans.[8] No single published monograph exists on the Korean or Vietnam era G.I. Bills. Indeed, very few studies exist on the G.I. Bills at all beyond the World War II generation. For example, in their recent textbook *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to*

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[7] Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Came True: The G. I. Bill and The Making of Modern America* (New York: Brassey's Inc., 1996), Milton Greenberg, *The G.I. Bill: The Law That Changed America* (New York: Lickle Publishing, 1997), Jennifer Keane, *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), Keith Olson, *The G.I. Bill, The Veterans, and The Colleges* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), David B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), Mark D. Van Ells, *To Hear Only Thunder Again: America's World War II Veterans Come Home* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books: 2001).

[8] In this study the term "Vietnam era veteran" refers to all veterans that served from August 4, 1964 through May 7, 1975. The term "Vietnam veteran" refers only to those veterans that served in the Southeast Asia Theater during this time. Vietnam era veteran is used most often to describe the benefits offered to all veterans under the Vietnam era bills because the bills made no distinction between where a veteran served. Vietnam veteran is used where the specific problems of combat theater veterans is discussed.

Need (2005), authors June Axxin and Mark J. Stern offer a detailed discussion of the development of veterans benefits after the Civil War, World War I, and World War II, but they dismiss Vietnam era benefits with one statement: "Veterans of Vietnam in particular paid the price of our unhappiness with that war."[9] Keith Olson's book discusses the Korea and Vietnam era G.I. Bills, but only in a cursory manner. Moreover, Olson's book appeared in 1974, long before the final chapter on the Vietnam era bills could be written; the government did not pass the most generous Vietnam era bill until December 1974 and the majority of Vietnam veterans did not return to school until after 1974. A brief overview of available government programs for Vietnam era veterans appeared in Sar A. Levitan and Joyce Zickler's *Swords Into Ploughshares: Our G.I. Bill,* but again this book only appeared in 1973. Similarly, the few unpublished dissertations on the later bills appeared in the mid 1970s and suffer from a lack of long-range perspective. [10]

Several studies allude to the educational attainment of Vietnam era veterans. Josefina Card's *Lives After Vietnam: Personal Impact of Military Service* (1983) discusses the educational levels of a sample group of Vietnam veterans relative to their non-veteran peers. Similarly, several articles discuss the impact education benefits on

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[9] June Axxin, and Mark J. Stern. *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need, 6th Edition* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2005), 302.

[10] Three studies—both unpublished and both almost 30 years old—offer limited insight into the Vietnam era bills. Joseph Herbert Pervis wrote a 70 page thesis on *The Vietnam Era Veteran in College* in 1974 at Kansas State, and Kenneth E. Fisher wrote a dissertation at Florida State University on *A Comparative Analysis of Selected Congressional Documents Related to Educational Benefits Legislated for The Veterans of World War II, The Korean Conflict, and The Vietnam Era Under the G.I. Bill* in 1975. Finally, David Bodenger's Ph.D. dissertation *Soldier's Bonuses: A History of Veterans Benefits in the United States, 1776-1967* written at Penn. State in 1972 covers only the very early years of the Vietnam era.

veterans since World War II.[11] The only allusions to the impact of the bill in more recent studies tend to be brief and contradictory. Jennifer Keane, in *Doughboys* suggests that:

> World War II veterans benefited from and contributed to a postwar economic boom that kept the unemployment rate below 5 percent. The singularity of this historical moment is underscored by life-course research on the Vietnam War. Military service did not have the same positive effect on the socioeconomic status of Vietnam veterans. Substantial aid to college-bound students in the 1960s and 1970s and scaled-back veterans' benefits meant that military service once again became time lost for veterans rather than the path to increased occupational and educational opportunities.[12]

By contrast, Eric T. Dean Jr., in *Shook Over Hell: Post Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (1997) hails the achievement of the Vietnam era bills by noting:

> By 1977 over 64 percent of Vietnam vets had used the G.I. Bill (compared with 55 percent by World War II veterans and 43.4 percent by Korean War veterans) and a greater percentage of these Vietnam veterans used the G.I. Bill to pursue higher education than ever before (60 percent, compared with 51 percent of Korean War veterans utilizing the bill and 30 percent of World War II veterans). By 1976 the source of the largest amount of federal aid for the nation's college students was not the Office of Education but the Veterans Administration.[13]

None of these studies offers any substantive discussion of the historical context or legislative background of the later bills. Such divergent interpretations in recently

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[11] Sar A. Levitan and Joyce Zickler, *Swords Into Ploughshares: Our G.I. Bill* (Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing Company, 1973), Card, Josefina J. *Lives After Vietnam: Personal Impact of Military Service* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1983). Studies on the impact of the bill on veterans include Jere Cohen, David R. Segal, and Lloyd V. Temme: "Military Service Was an Educational Disadvantage to Vietnam–Era Personnel" *Sociology and Social Research* 1986 70(3): 206-208, "The Impact of Education on Vietnam-Era Veterans' Occupational Attainment" *Social Science Quarterly* 1992 73(2): 397-409, and "Military Service and Educational attainment in the All-Volunteer Force" *Social Science Quarterly* 1995 76(1): 88-104, and Joshua D. Angrist, "The Effect of Veterans Benefits on Education and Earnings," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 1993 46(4): 637-652.

[12] Keane, *Doughboys*, 213.

[13] Eric T. Dean Jr., *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam and the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 13.

published books reveal the lack of a definitive understanding of the Vietnam era bills and point to the need for more thorough analysis.

A cursory look at the available statistics suggests that the G.I. Bills of 1966, 1972, and 1974 potentially had an enormous influence on the lives of returning veterans and on the nation's social, political, and economic landscape. The 1984 *Veterans Administration Annual Report* notes that over 72 percent of Vietnam era veterans—those who served between August 4, 1964 and May 7, 1974—claimed their education benefits under the G.I. Bill, more than half of this total for a college level education. Vietnam era veterans used their education benefits at a considerably higher rate than either World War II veterans (51 percent) or Korean Conflict veterans (43 percent). Moreover, the cost to the government of education benefits under the post-1966 bills exceeded 38.5 billion dollars, almost two-and-a-half times the cost of the World War II G.I. Bill.[14] Clearly, given the sheer numbers of veterans involved and the cost of the program, the story of the G.I. Bill does not stop with the World War II generation.

Much as the praise heaped on the World War II bill stems from the "Good War" narrative of that war, the failure to explore the later G.I. Bills era stems, in part, from the dominant "Bad War" narrative of the Vietnam War. Vietnam veterans—those that served in the Southeast Asia Theater—went to college in similar numbers to those veterans that served elsewhere during the Vietnam era, but their story is rarely told. In the standard Vietnam War narrative, an arrogant and misguided government sent tens of thousands of idealistic young men to their deaths for a cause that few believed in, not

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[14] *Veterans Administration Annual Report, 1984* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), 81.

even the South Vietnamese people the Unites States was supposed to be helping. The government then stabbed its own soldiers in the back by placing political constraints on their fighting capabilities, denying them any chance for victory. Then, when the Vietnam veterans came home, they faced nothing but contempt from an uncaring public and a government that cared little for their sacrifices. Shunned by society, many then retreated into worlds of isolation and despair.[15]

Reinforcing the stereotype, for several decades after the war, academic studies that dealt in any way with the government treatment of the Vietnam veteran or the Vietnam veteran's homecoming experience concentrated almost exclusively on the negative. In doing so, they have contributed to a widely-held cultural image of the Vietnam veterans as maladjusted. Examples of such works include Murray Polner's *No Victory Parades: The Return of the Vietnam Veteran* (1971), Robert J. Lifton's *Home From the War: Vietnam Veterans: Neither Victims Nor Executioners* (1973), David E. Bonior, et al *The Vietnam Veteran: a History of Neglect* (1983), and Myra McPherson's *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation* (1983). Similarly, Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1994) perpetuates the image of Vietnam veterans as emotionally crippled. More recently, Shay continued this line of argument in *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trial of*

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[15] For some of the best books on the mythmaking to come out of the Vietnam War see John Hellman, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), H. Bruce Franklin, *MIA, or Mythmaking in America* (Brooklyn, New York: L. Hill Books, 1992) and Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

Homecoming (2002). All of these studies define the Vietnam veteran's experience as unique. They emphasize such a factors as the 'unseen' nature of the enemy in Vietnam, the inability to form emotionally supportive 'buddy' groups due to constant troop rotation, and the public and governmental neglect of veterans upon their return home as making the Vietnam veteran a uniquely troubled figure in American history.[16]

Beginning in the early 1970s, the media and popular culture amplified the maladjusted veteran stereotype. Newspapers and newsmagazine shows regularly carried stories of veteran problems.[17] Movies such as *Coming Home* (1978), *First Blood* (1982), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) depicted the Vietnam veteran as emotionally and physically crippled. Television shows, novels, and pulp fiction perpetuated the stereotype with innumerous depictions of Vietnam veterans struggling to come to terms with their wartime experiences and unable to adjust to post-service life.[18] Clearly, there is no room to incorporate any positive aspects of the G.I. Bill into such a narrative.

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[16] David E. Bonior, Steven M. Champlin, and Timothy S. Kolly. *The Vietnam Veteran: A History of Neglect* (New York: Praeger, 1984), Robert J. Lifton, *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans, Neither Victims nor Executioners* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973) Myra Macpherson, *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation, New Edition,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), Murray Polner, *No Victory Parades: The Return of the Vietnam Veteran* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1971). Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Atheneum, 1994), and *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and The Trial of Homecoming* (New York: Atheneum, 2002).

[17] See, for example the wealth of negative press stories collected in *Source Material on the Vietnam Veteran* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974).

[18] See Michael Anderegg (ed.), *Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), James William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Paramilitary culture in Post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994) and Mark Boulton, *Repatriation Through Film: The Role of the American Film Industry in Changing Public Perceptions about Vietnam Soldiers and Veterans since the late 1970s* (Masters Thesis, University of Southern Mississippi, 1997).

According to the standard narrative, Vietnam veterans would be too busy overcoming their own demons to even think about going back to school.

As with the World War II narrative, the Vietnam narrative contains elements of truth. Many veterans did return with problems not of their own making. But recently, a number of studies have begun to reexamine the Vietnam veteran homecoming experience. Eric T. Dean Jr.'s *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam and the Civil War* (1997) reveals that Vietnam veterans may not have experienced any unique psychological burdens and that any problems they may have experienced were a normal and temporary consequence of wartime service. According to Dean, Vietnam veterans lead more successful and productive lives than their non-veteran peers. He argues that the unstable veteran image has persisted due to political, social, and cultural motives of a variety of special interests. B.G. Burkett makes a similar claim, albeit more forcefully, in his book *Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation was Robbed of its Heroes and its History* (1998). According to Burkett, Vietnam veterans have become some of the most successful members of their generation, having achieved greater economic and personal success and have contributed more as leaders of society than their non-veteran counterparts. Based on a wealth of primary source research, Burkett suggests that Vietnam veterans have lower suicide and unemployment rates than non-veterans and that the vast majority served honorably and came home to normal successful lives. Such studies suggest the need for a more thorough and objective reevaluation of the Vietnam

veteran homecoming experience and a need to question the dominant stereotype of government neglect and veteran maladjustment.[19]

This dissertation adds to the debates on the Vietnam veteran's readjustment and the government's treatment of Vietnam veterans by placing G.I. Bill back into their homecoming story. The emphasis is on the *origins of the Vietnam era G.I. Bills and the debates that occurred at the federal level* that led to their distinctive character.[20] Moreover, this study focuses *only on the higher education benefits* offered under the Vietnam era bills. As was true for World War II veterans, Vietnam veterans could claim a wide range of benefits including money for vocational training and home loans. For veterans, however, education benefits are the best known and most appreciated of the G.I. Bill benefits and were, by far, the most contested feature of the Vietnam era bills. All of

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[19] Eric T. Dean Jr, *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam and the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), B.G. Burkett and Glenna Whitley, *Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation was Robbed of its Heroes and its History* (Dallas: Verity Press, 1998).

[20] Because of restraints of time and resources, this dissertation does not explore fully several vitally important issues that seem worthy of further study. As such, the scope and aims of this project are limited. For example, this dissertation does not examine in any great detail how the benefits changed veterans' lives. Nor does this study examine the impact of the bills on higher education. Given the vast amounts of money the government poured into higher education following the 1966 G.I. Bill—far more than under the World War II G.I. Bill—the impact on higher education must have been considerable. Finally, this study does not discuss the later bills in the context of the development of the welfare state in America. Because of an almost continuous draft from 1940 through 1973 and the extension of benefits to veterans' dependents, a large minority of the population, perhaps as many as a third, could potentially claim a vast array of benefits including health care and education benefits during the Vietnam era. The fact that the defenders of freedom could enjoy access to what was, in effect, one of the most expensive and elaborate socialist systems in the western hemisphere with barely a voice raised in objection demands further attention. Each of these issues seems worthy of a discreet monograph, but they are covered only tangentially here because they would have required would a new set of research questions and methods and extensive additional research. I hope that this work might encourage such further investigations.

the major political debates between Congress and the White House and the clamor in the press over the Vietnam era bills revolved around the level of education benefits offered. At the end of the 1960s and throughout much of the 1970s, education benefits became the touchstone by which many veterans judged their treatment by the government.

Unlike the original 1944 G.I. Bill, the Vietnam era G.I. Bills were conceived and molded almost exclusively by politicians in Washington D.C. World War I veterans, and in particular the American Legion, had played a central role in the passage of the original bill. Stung by their experiences as World War I veterans, the Legion pushed tirelessly for the passage of a generous benefits package for World War II veterans. By contrast, Vietnam veterans placed little pressure on the government and World War II veterans seemed reluctant to fight for their successors. In general, Vietnam veterans never organized on any great scale to force the government into offering similar rewards. Older established veterans organizations, in particular the "Big Three" of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled Veterans of America, supported the Vietnam veterans, but they tended to have the interests of World War II veterans at heart and never threw the full weight of their lobbying machine into the fight to secure generous benefits for Vietnam Veterans. Because of this vacuum, the Vietnam era bills emerged largely from the initiatives of individual politicians such as Ralph Yarborough (D-TX), Vance Hartke (D-IN), and Alan Cranston (D-CA) in the Senate. Thereafter, the bills had to negotiate a treacherous path through the House Veterans Affairs Committee headed by the obstinate Olin Teague (D-TX), and pass an often obstructionist White House influenced by a parsimonious Budget of the Bureau and Office of Management and Business, and a less than munificent Veterans Administration. The political

compromises made at the highest levels of government set the stage for the both problems and the promise of the later bills. The debates between the Congress and the White House determined how much veterans would receive and ultimately dictated the success or failure of the program. To analyze these political debates, the source base for this study is comprised predominantly of presidential papers and printed congressional materials. These sources reveal clearly the different ideological and economic concerns and the background compromises made by Congress, the White House, and the vested federal agencies that gave the bills their final form.

This focus on the political origins of the bills accomplishes several goals. First, it adds a new understanding to the story of government treatment of the returning Vietnam veteran. The G.I. Bill during the Vietnam era was not, at first, as generous as the original 1944 bill, but this initial low level of funding did not result from simple government neglect. Numerous economic and ideological reasons lay behind the government's actions that mitigate, in part, the lower benefits offered during the early years of the program. These reasons include Lyndon Johnson's desire for universal education benefits and Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford's attempts to reverse the nation's economic downturn. The conclusions of this study do not overturn completely the narrative of neglect, but they certainly make it more complicated. Problems clearly existed in the formulation of the Vietnam era G.I. Bills. This study does, however, provide a context for understanding these problems without the kind of hyperbole and emotion that has infused many previous discussions of the government's treatment of veterans.

The government never completely turned its back on Vietnam veterans in terms of education benefits and an unprecedented number of veterans did make use of federal

benefits to improve their lives. In many ways, the later G.I. Bills offered greater opportunities to Vietnam veterans than the much-vaunted 1944 bill had provided World War II veterans. The government created a slew of new programs designed to help lower income veterans and conducted an extensive outreach effort to inform veterans of their entitlements. Vietnam era veterans also had longer than any previous generation of veterans to claim their benefits. Ultimately, certain factors—many outside of the government's control, such as the spiraling costs of higher education and the uneven costs of education across different states—compromised the usefulness of the benefits for many veterans and reduced the quality of education they could attain. The government was slow to recognize such problems and often failed to appreciate the specific needs of the Vietnam generation of veterans. But even though the later G.I. Bills were never the same kind of unqualified success as the original bill, Vietnam veterans did at least have recourse to a program that allowed millions to better their lives.

Second, this study adds an important and neglected story to the narrative of the Vietnam veterans' homecoming experience. As evidenced by their participation rates, Vietnam veterans proved far more interested in returning to school after service than their World War II counterparts. Of course, one major reason for this discrepancy is that higher education had become a much more integrated part of life in the 1960s and 1970s than it had been in 1945. Even so, the fact that so many Vietnam veterans used their G.I. Bill benefits for education suggests that most were determined to improve their lives and not just drop out of society. Contrary to the standard narrative, if you wanted to find a Vietnam veteran in the mid 1970s you would have much more success looking in your local college or university than you would looking in a jail, or a homeless shelter, or a

drug rehabilitation clinic. The fact that so many Vietnam veterans did choose to return to school despite initially receiving lower benefits than the World War II generation further testifies to their resolve. Despite their problems, the later G.I. Bills should still play a central role in our understanding of the Vietnam veteran's post-service experience.

Third, examining the story of veterans' benefits in the Vietnam era helps put the experience of the Vietnam veteran into the broader context of the veteran experience in America. In particular, the story allows greater comparisons to be made with previous and current generations of veterans. There were differences in the form and amount of benefits offered between the original G.I. Bill and later versions, but the purposes of the bills remained the same, and the government obligation toward veterans for service remained. Moreover, the Vietnam veteran's thirst for education and desire for self-improvement suggests a commonality in the veteran experience with the World War II generation that is rarely acknowledged in the standard "Good War/Bad War" narrative.

Finally, because this story takes place inside the Beltway in Washington, it offers a new dimension to our understanding of post-1945 political history. By examining the attitudes of successive presidents toward veterans' benefits, this study offers a new perspective on their ideological and economic outlooks. This story also reveals the contradictions between public professions of support for veterans and the reality of the behind-the-scenes maneuverings to put a cap on the government's generosity. Repeatedly, Presidents Eisenhower, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford gave glowing public testimonies to veterans, praising them for their contributions to securing the nation's freedom. But there were limits to their gratitude, as each president, for different ideological or economic reasons, sought to reduce the amount of benefits offered.

A cast of politicians on Capitol Hill contributed to this process of working out exactly how much the nation owed its warriors for their service. They faced daunting questions—questions that had dogged presidents and politicians for centuries before them—over what constitutes a just reward for putting one's life on hold to fight for the nation's self-professed goal of defending liberty throughout the globe. In making these difficult decisions in troubled times, in quantifying the veteran's sacrifice, they really were trying to put a price on freedom.

Chapter 1

ANTECEDENTS: FEDERAL DEBATES OVER VETERANS' BENEFITS UP TO 1964

> Though undying gratitude is the meed [sic] of every one who served, it is not to be said that a material bestowal is an obligation to those who emerged from the great conflict not only unharmed, but physically, mentally and spiritually richer for the great experience.
>
> President Warren Harding

> no person, because he wore a uniform, must thereafter be placed in a special class of beneficiaries over and above all other citizens. The fact of wearing a uniform does not mean that he can demand and receive from his Government a benefit which no other citizen receives.
>
> President Franklin D. Roosevelt

> Military service in time of war or peace is an obligation of citizenship and should not be considered inherently a basis of future Government benefits.
>
> *Bradley Report*

The Vietnam era G.I. Bills emerged from the precedents established during the centuries of debate over what a society owes its citizens for military service. Taking their cue from the 1593 English Acte for Reliefes of Souldiours, the American colonies passed laws promising to pay benefits to veterans injured in the line of service. Virginia passed the first such law in 1624, the Plymouth colony followed in 1636, and by 1777 all colonies with the exception of Connecticut pledged to care for their disabled veterans.[1] In August 1776, just weeks after cleaving from the British Empire, the Continental Congress made the first steps toward codifying the federal government's obligation to veterans when it passed legislation providing for half pay for life for disabled veterans. Such payments for veterans injured defending the national interest proved to be one of least controversial areas in future contests over veteran funding. The idea that the rest of

[1] June Axxin and Mark J. Stern, *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need, 6th Edition* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2005), 30-31.

society should compensate any citizen whose life goals and means of earning a living might have been compromised defending the national interest enjoyed wide acceptance. By offering assistance to injured veterans, the government ensured that the burden of military service could be distributed in some small measure more equally across society. Although a slight hike in taxes hardly equates to the loss of a limb or other injury, the idea of disability compensation recognized that wartime hardships should not be limited to the few.

The Continental Congress also extended the colonial tradition of offering land grants to soldiers that agreed to enlist for the duration of the war, although in part these land grants represented an attempt to induce mercenaries to defect from the British. In 1780, the Congress codified the principle of providing assistance for veterans' dependants when it pledged to give half pay for seven years to the widows and orphans of Revolutionary War officers. All veterans received mustering out pay.

The provision of benefits to non-disabled Revolutionary War veterans was far from automatic and the debates over who should receive benefits raised questions over patriotism and military service that would resonate right up through the Vietnam era. Jack Resch's *Suffering Soldiers: Revolutionary War Veterans, Moral Sentiment, and Political Culture in the Early Republic* (1999) reveals that Thomas Jefferson and many of his supporters were apprehensive about the corrosive effect on the nation's moral character of offering pensions and payments to non-disabled veterans.[2] For Jefferson and his followers, virtuous citizen-soldiers who required no recompense for performing their

[2] Jack Resch, *Suffering Soldiers: Revolutionary War Veterans, Moral Sentiment, and Political Culture in the Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

civic republican duty fought and won the Revolution. Pensions, they suggested, constituted an unnecessary reward and many feared that they might lead to the corrupting traditions of Old World standing armies.

Moreover, some feared that creation of special privileges for veterans would set them apart from the rest of society and thus undermine the democratic intent of the Revolution. At the core of revolutionary ideology stood the repudiation of class privilege and status associated with the Old World.[3] The creation of a distinct and privileged group of veterans might foreshadow the formation kind of stratified society rejected in 1776. Even as late as 1818, when Congress debated the passage of the Revolutionary War Pensions act, North Carolina senator Nathaniel Macon warned that offering pensions to those not injured in service was "repugnant to the principles of our Government, and at war with good sense and public justice."[4] The military exigencies of the War of 1812, combined with widespread press reporting of veteran hardship eventually overrode such objections, and in 1818 Revolutionary War veterans became the first ever recipients of a large scale federal pension program in the United States. Early in the program eligibility extended only to veterans demonstrating need, but in 1832, all veterans received pensions regardless of financial condition.

Offering inducements and ongoing payments for veterans established one of the more controversial principles of veterans' benefits. As Jefferson and Macon had suggested, every citizen in a participatory democracy could and should owe some

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[3] See Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967) and Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

[4] Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, 107.

obligation to the state, including military service. At key points over the next 200 years, many presidents and politicians questioned whether rewarding citizens to defend their nation undermined this democratic principle. As benefits grew more elaborate and generous, the questioning grew correspondingly louder.

The precedents established by the Revolutionary War extended to the wars of the nineteenth century. Veterans of both the wars of 1812 and the Mexican War of 1845 received immediate land grants and disabled veterans received compensation. The issue of pensions got resolved less quickly. Not until 1871 did veterans of the War of 1812 receive pensions. Mexican War veterans had to wait until 1887.

Union veterans of the Civil War received similar benefits to their predecessors, but the benefits became more generous and eligibility requirements more liberal. Disabled Union soldiers received disability compensation at a rate determined by their rank and the degree of their disability. Instead of outright land grants, the government gave veterans preferential treatment under the Homestead Act by allowing them to count a period equal to the duration of their service toward the length of time required for them to own the land. For the first time, veterans also received preferential treatment when applying for federal employment. Injured and disabled veterans also received medical care through the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers.[5]

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[5] Background to nineteenth century and World War I benefits from Axinn and Stern, *Social Welfare*, David Bodenger, *Soldier's Bonuses: A History of Veterans Benefits in the United States, 1776-1967* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1972), Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*: *The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), Roger Daniels, *The Bonus March: An Episode of the Great Depression* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing, 1972), and Amy W. Knight

Factors other than need led to the expansion of Civil War benefits. The lobbying efforts of pension lawyers contributed to the passage of the Arrears Act of 1879 that allowed Civil War veterans to claim benefits retroactively for service related injuries. The Republican Party, keen to expand the spoils-base of their patronage network, and the Grand Army of the Republic, the powerful Union veterans' organization, then helped push through the Dependant Pensions Act of 1890 that decreed that veterans could claim disability benefits even if their injury did not occur whilst in service. In effect, the provisions of the 1890 act established a permanent pension system for aging veterans.[6] Because of more liberalized benefits, the costs to government skyrocketed by the end of the nineteenth century. By one estimate, veterans' pensions alone accounted for almost 43 percent of all government expenditures by 1893.[7]

The provision of liberal benefits to veterans while much of the country struggled to adjust to the economic pressures of industrialization set veterans apart as a special class in the United States. As Theda Skocpol notes in *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (1992), veterans avoided the stigma attached to government handouts because society deemed that they had earned their benefits through military service. Many western countries responded to industrialization by offering benefits to their poor. The United States never followed suit and the government eschewed nationwide relief to their most needy. But veterans had now solidified their privileged position in society, establishing in Skocpol's words, "a

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and Robert L. Worden, *Veterans Benefits Administration, An Organizational History, 1776-1994* (Collingdale, Philadelphia: Diane Publishing Company, 1995).

[6]See Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, and Mary Dearing, *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952).

[7] Daniels, *The Bonus March*, 11.

moral ordering of claims on the federal government's largesse."[8] The Civil War established the precedent of providing generous benefits for veterans, but the enormous costs of benefits also raised the question of just how much should veterans be compensated for service. These questions intensified after World War I.

The cost and inefficiency—including allegations of fraud—of the nineteenth century benefits system prompted a change in the philosophy and distribution of benefits during World War I. The 1914 War Risk Insurance Act offered merchant seamen at risk from submarine attacks low cost insurance to compensate them or their families in the event of death or disability. Following the recommendations of Woodrow Wilson's 1917 Council of National Defense the government extended this provision to all of the nation's soldiers hoping this measure would preclude the need for costly pensions at some point further down the road. Veterans' dependants also received allotments paid for by the soldiers and the government. The government, for the first time, offered vocational training for disabled veterans. By offering training, the government attempted to give veterans the kind of advancement in life they could have received had they not entered the military and remained in public life learning a trade. The provision of vocational benefits set another significant precedent for future veterans' benefit packages. In 1919, veterans became eligible for medical care for service-connected injuries (in 1924 veterans could receive medical care for non-service connected injuries in addition). But in the

[8] Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 149.

aftermath of the conflict, the most contentious debates over funding centered on the issue of a cash bonus for veterans.[9]

Proponents of the bonus argued that servicemen earned less in military service than they would have as civilians and should be compensated through a one-time cash payment. This idea that citizens should be compensated for service resurrected questions about civic obligation in a participatory democracy. When vetoing a proposed bonus in 1924, Calvin Coolidge argued, "Patriotism which is bought and paid for is not patriotism. . . . Service to our country in time of war means sacrifice. It is for that reason alone that we honor and revere it. To attempt to make a money payment out of the earnings of the people to those who are physically well and financially able is to abandon one of our most cherished ideals."[10] For Coolidge, the concept of paying citizens to fight in defense of their national interests ran antithetical to the cherished image of the citizen soldiers of Revolutionary War taking up arms to fight for the common good in the face of external threats. The Minuteman was at risk of becoming a Hessian mercenary.

Other critics of the bonus made their arguments with similar allusions to the nation's ideological heritage. In the heady laissez faire atmosphere of the early 1920s, Warren Harding and other fiscal conservatives, such as influential Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, warned that the creation of an entrenched system of benefits might make

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[9] For further discussion on interwar benefits see Bodenger, *Soldier's Bonuses,* Daniels, *The Bonus March,* Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen, *The Bonus Army: An America Epic* (New York: Walker & Company, 2004), William P. Dillingham, *Federal Aid to Veterans, 1917-1941* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952), Jennifer Keane, *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), and Donald J Lisio, *The President and Protest: Hoover, Macarthur, and the Bonus Riot* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994).

[10] Dickson and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 28.

veterans a special interest welfare group. Harding even took the unusual step of appearing on Capitol Hill in an attempt to dissuade the Senate from voting on a bonus bill.[11] Despite the seemingly healthy state of the nation's finances, Harding's arguments also contained warnings of the financial burden of the bonus. In his message before the Senate he warned that such a measure might "emperil [sic] the financial stability of our country."[12] In his veto message, Harding reiterated the view that the government owed fewer obligations to able-bodied veterans when he stated:

> Though undying gratitude is the meed [sic] of every one who served, it is not to be said that a material bestowal is an obligation to those who emerged from the great conflict not only unharmed, but physically, mentally and spiritually richer for the great experience.

As his glowing assessment of wartime service might reveal, Harding never served on the front lines. The arguments put forward by Harding and Coolidge—one financial, the other ideological—failed to resonate in Congress as both the House and Senate voted to override Harding's veto, albeit by small margins. Following the override, the government issued World War I veterans a certificate for a bonus to be paid in 1945. But the arguments against veteran privilege did not go away.

Even Franklin D. Roosevelt, hardly renowned for keeping a tight reign on the nation's finances, fought against giving veterans a privileged status. Before he took office, the infamous Bonus March of 1932 and the ensuing violent struggles would have left Roosevelt in no doubt as to the need for government handouts in the veteran community in the wake of the Great Depression. Despite the protests, one of Roosevelt's

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[11] Daniels, *Bonus March*, 29.
[12] Quoted in ibid., 29.

first acts after entering the White House was to place a moratorium on veterans' benefits in order to reevaluate the nation's finances. According to one estimate, at the time of the decision veterans comprised only 1 percent of the population while claiming almost 24 percent of the budget.[13] Under his Economy Act of 1933, Roosevelt cut all veterans benefits to able-bodied veterans and even slashed benefits for disabled veterans. In making his decision, Roosevelt listened carefully to director of the budget Lewis Douglas. Douglas, a former Arizona congressman, served in France in World War I, but believed that veterans should not be given open ended rewards if their lives had not been impaired in any way. In October 1933, Roosevelt addressed the American Legion Convention in Chicago and argued forcefully against sweeping veteran benefits. He claimed:

> no person, because he wore a uniform, must thereafter be placed in a special class of beneficiaries over and above all other citizens. The fact of wearing a uniform does not mean that he can demand and receive from his Government a benefit which no other citizen receives. It does not mean that because a person served in the defense of his country, performed a basic obligation of citizenship, he should receive a pension from his Government because of a disability incurred after his service had terminated, and not connected with that service.[14]

Even as he sought to establish a sweeping welfare state, Roosevelt consistently opposed direct handouts to veterans. In 1935, he vetoed Congress's attempts to allow early payment of the bonus to needy veterans. In his lengthy veto message he claimed that the benefits already offered World War I veterans had proved sufficient and argued that veterans would be better served through the general uplifting of the nation's fortunes:

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[13] Dickson and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 208.

[14] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt*, "Address to the American Legion Convention, Chicago Illinois," October 2, 1933.

> The veteran who suffers from this depression can best be aided by the rehabilitation of the country as a whole. His country with honor and gratitude returned him at the end of the war to the citizenry from which he came. He became once more a member of the great civilian population. His interests became identified with its fortunes and also with its misfortunes.

Roosevelt never questioned the service and sacrifice veterans had given the nation. What he did doubt was that military service should give veterans a license to perpetually call on the government in times of hardship. Roosevelt never opposed giving veterans some assistance. He proposed that the government should help veterans to help themselves by channeling them into New Deal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps. During the less well known and less contentious Bonus March of 1933, he placated many veterans by offering them transportation and assistance in signing up for CCC projects.[15] But to Roosevelt, giving veterans a direct handout for services that should be a natural obligation of citizenship seemed like too much of a boondoggle. He had no problem in passing universal legislation that helped the most desperate and needy in society, including veterans, but he did not believe that veterans deserved to be singled out for privileged treatment. Ultimately, Congress did not share FDR's views. Following stories of veteran hardship in the press, including some high profile suicides, they clawed back most of the cuts made under the Economy Act and in 1936 overrode the President's veto of the Bonus.[16] Twelve years after it was promised, but nine years before it was due, the veterans got their bonus.

Given the contentious nature of the veteran question during the interwar years, Washington started planning early for the potentially tumultuous return of more than

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[15] See Daniels, *Bonus March*, 229-230, and Keane, *Doughboys*, 202.
[16] Dixon and Allen, *Bonus Army*, 209.

fifteen million veterans after World War II. The specter of the Bonus March heightened fears of what might happen if the economy could not absorb the returning veterans. Early veterans' measures mirrored closely those offered World War I veterans. The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 gave an early palliative by guaranteeing that veterans could return to their jobs after service, while the National Life Insurance Act of 1940 offered servicemen and women life and disability insurance. Dependants of soldiers received allotments under the Servicemen Dependants Allowance Act of 1942. Finally, the Mustering Out Pay Act of 1944 offered some immediate relief to discharged soldiers in the form of small direct handouts.[17] But given the sheer numbers of veterans involved in the war effort and the precarious nature of the economy, a clear need existed for a more comprehensive benefits package.

Although many politicians tried to resurrect the idea of a bonus, most proscriptions for compensating veterans emphasized training and education.[18] Roosevelt's Armed Forces Committee on Post-War Educational Opportunities for Service Personnel, formed in November 1942 and headed by Brigadier General Frederick G. Osborn, advocated education benefits as a means to help veterans reintegrate back into society. Similarly, the National Resources Planning Board conducted numerous studies into the potential problems facing returning veterans and in the summer of 1943 called for a comprehensive package of training and education benefits. These proposals found favor in the White House. Roosevelt retained his opposition to the idea of adjusted

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[17] See Axxin and Stern, *Social Welfare*, and Keith Olson, *The G.I. Bill, The Veterans, and The Colleges* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974).

[18] See David B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 67-87.

compensation or direct handouts for veterans. Instead, he favored offering veterans education and training outlets so that they could craft better lives for themselves upon their return. In a message to Congress in October 1943, Roosevelt stated that the new benefits should extend the principle that veterans should be compensated for time lost from civilian life when he noted:

> Every day that the war continues interrupts the schooling and training of more men and women, and deprives them of the education and skills which they would otherwise acquire for use in later life. Not only the individual welfare of our troops, but the welfare of the Nation itself, requires that we reverse this trend just as quickly as possible after the war. Vocational and educational opportunities for veterans should be of the widest range.[19]

Before the end of the war, over 600 separate bills entered Congress promising veterans everything from medical coverage to education benefits to furlough pay.[20] None gathered much momentum until the American Legion intervened. Formed as a veteran advocacy group in 1919 and comprised mainly of World War I veterans, Legion members knew better than most the needs of the returning soldier. Harry Colmery, a World War I veteran and former Legion National Commander, drafted a "Bill of Rights for G.I. Joe and G.I. Jane," which included provisions for such benefits as unemployment insurance, funding for higher education or employment training, and home loans.[21]

After the bill's introduction to Congress on January 1, 1944, the Legion conducted an intensive lobbying media campaign to gain public and political support.

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[19] *Public Papers, Roosevelt*, "Message to Congress on the Education of War Veterans," October 27, 1943.

[20] Keane, *Doughboys*, 208.

[21] See William Pencak, *For God and Country: The American Legion, 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989) and Thomas A. Rumer, *The American Legion: An Official History, 1919-1989* (New York: M. Evans & Co., 1990).

William Randolph Hearst threw the considerable weight of his newspaper conglomerate behind the Legion's cause. In a letter to the *New York Journal American*, he called on the nation's politicians to "think less about their own personal 'place in history' and think more about the men whose heroism and self sacrifice make the place possible."[22] Hearst later wrote, "Republics are proverbially ungrateful. . . . It fights its wars with children . . . and when it has mutilated them or blinded them, refuses to care for them adequately or even to try properly to rehabilitate them and make their lives more endurable and useful."[23]

There were some opponents of the bill. Some educators feared—misguidedly—that an influx of veterans might dilute of the quality of the nation's college students. The Disabled American Veterans opposed widespread benefits for fear that the more pressing needs of disabled veterans might be ignored to accommodate the financial burden of the new measures. But most Americans agreed that something had to be done to aid their returning warriors. The Roosevelt administration initially favored a proposal by Utah senator Elbert D. Thomas that provided even more liberal education benefits than the Legion's bill, but the basic tenets of both bills were similar enough to make compromise relatively easy to achieve. In Congress, Mississippi Representative John Rankin raised most of the objections, questioning, for example, which agency should administer the benefits, whether the legislation compromised states rights, and whether the emphasis on education benefits prejudicial to Southern and Western veterans who might normally

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[22] Quoted in Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses*, 80.
[23] Ibid., 80-81.

eschew higher education.[24] Prejudice also lay at the heart of Rankin's objections as he bristled at the thought of equal benefits for all races. But for such an all-encompassing piece of legislation, and especially when compared with the previous and later debates over veteran benefits, the G.I. Bill enjoyed a relatively smooth passage through Congress. On June 22, 1944 President Roosevelt signed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act into law. In his signing remarks Roosevelt claimed that the bill "gives emphatic notice to the men and women in our armed forces that the American people do not intend to let them down." He reiterated the main justification for the bill by noting that veterans "have been compelled to make greater economic sacrifice and every other kind of sacrifice than the rest of us, and are entitled to definite action to help take care of their special problems."[25]

Although it built on the precedents of previous veterans' legislation, the scope of benefits offered under the G.I. Bill was unprecedented. Returning veterans had the option of claiming unemployment insurance for the first fifty-two weeks after discharge at a rate of twenty dollars a month. Over nine million out of approximately 15.4 million eligible veterans joined what became known as the "52-20 Club." Unemployment insurance offered veterans a welcome respite before deciding what to do next with their lives. On average, these veterans used their benefits for only seventeen weeks before finding employment or furthering their education. In addition, over 2.3 million took advantage of the low-rate home loans. The bill also offered veterans loans to start businesses or invest in farming. However, by some distance the education benefits

[24] See Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses*, 89-125.
[25] *Public Papers, Roosevelt*, "Statement on Signing the G.I. Bill," June 22, 1944.

remain the most well known and, among veterans, the most appreciated aspects of the G.I. Bill.

Before World War II, a college education tended to be the preserve of wealthier, generally white Americans. But the educational benefits offered under the G.I. Bill forever changed the nature of higher education. The bill offered veterans the opportunity to attend the college of their choice irrespective of race, class, or gender. Consequently, higher education became far more democratized as Americans from all walks of life entered school, many becoming the first in their family to do so. Once they had chosen the school they wished to attend, veterans received up to 500 dollars a year for tuition and a single veteran received a monthly stipend of fifty dollars to live off (this amount increased to sixty-five dollars in 1946 and seventy-five dollars in 1948). A veteran who claimed dependants received a proportionally higher payment. The generous tuition payment allowed veterans to attend even the most elite colleges as *Time* magazine noted when it asked the rhetorical question "why go to Podunk U if you can go to Yale."[26] To claim benefits, a veteran had to have served at least ninety days and have left the service a total with an "other than dishonorable discharge." In return, the veteran received benefits for one full year plus a period equal to the time of their service up to a total of forty-eight months. By the program's end on July 25, 1956, approximately 2.2 million veterans had used their benefits for higher education. A further 3.4 million attended other institutions of learning such as vocational schools, and about 1.4 million received on-the-job training.

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[26] Milton Greenberg, *The G.I. Bill: The Law That Changed America* (New York: Lickle Publishing, 1997), 44.

The genius of the 1944 G.I. Bill lay in its ability to reward veterans generously while managing to avoid most of the complaints leveled against previous benefits packages. Compared with veterans of previous wars, the World War II veteran became the most rewarded soldier the United States had ever sent into battle. Yet, compared with previous and future debates over veteran benefits, the debates over the 1944 bill were remarkably muted. By placing training and education at the center of the veterans' readjustment needs instead of a simple cash bonus or an open-ended commitment to a future pension, legislators avoided the charge that veterans were being transformed into a privileged social class. Opponents of a welfare state including William Randolph Hearst could support the concept of giving veterans an opportunity to better themselves rather than a handout. Although in practical terms, the opportunities given veterans created, in the words of historian Jennifer Keane, "the most privileged generation in American history," the G.I. Bill was a politically acceptable and widely lauded answer to the veteran question.[27]

The original Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 laid the broad conceptual framework for the G.I. Bills that followed. The idea that veterans should be offered educational and vocational benefits and home loans as recompense for military service ultimately became a central feature of the benefits packages offered to all post-World War II veterans. The G.I. Bill raised the expectations of future veterans as to what they might expect after coming home from war. But the provision of later G.I. Bills was far from automatic and there were significant differences between the World War II bill and the later Vietnam era bills. Many of the more controversial aspects of the Vietnam era

[27] Keane, *Doughboys*, 212.

bills originated in the debates over the Korean Conflict G.I. Bill and in the broader federal debates over veteran funding that took place at the mid and late 1950s.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the 1944 G.I. Bill garnered almost universal praise for what it did for the veterans and for the nation's economy. But beneath the seemingly perfect surface of this iconic legislation stirred currents of discontent. Not surprisingly, given the scale and cost of the first G.I. Bills, the government charged several agencies with conducting investigations into the bill's successes and failures. Both the Veterans Administration (VA) and the General Accounting Office conducted inquiries into the efficacy of the legislation. In addition, several committees in Congress held formal hearings on the bill.[28] The House Select Committee to Conduct a Study and Investigation of the Educational, Training and Loan Guarantee Programs of World War II Veterans produced the report destined to have the biggest impact on later versions of the G.I. Bill. This investigation also marked the emergence of Olin Teague (D-TX) as one of the most influential figures in veterans' affairs in the mid twentieth century.

Known widely as "Tiger" Teague, Teague had covered himself in glory as an infantryman during World War II before entering politics. He went ashore with the D-Day invasions on June 6, 1944 and went on to win the Silver Star with two clusters, a Bronze Star, and the Purple Heart with two clusters. He had achieved the rank of colonel upon his discharge in September 1946. He entered Congress that same year, and served as the Democratic representative for the Sixth Congressional District in Texas until 1977. When asked why he entered public service, Teague once commented, "I landed on Utah

[28] Olson, *G.I. Bill*, 105.

Beach and saw hundreds of bodies stacked up. I started thinking about what causes hell like that, and I decided it was government. I decided I wanted to do something about it."[29]

Over an eighteen-month period from 1950 to 1952, Teague's committee heard testimony from VA officials, educators, veterans, and other parties affected by the G.I. Bill. The Committee uncovered widespread cases of fraud by education institutions. Because the original bill paid tuition directly to accredited institutions, many colleges and training establishments arbitrarily raised their tuition rates. The government guaranteed payment of tuition up to 500 dollars per year. By pushing tuition rates close to the 500-dollar level, the offending institutions attempted to maximize their return from the flood of veterans that swelled their rolls in the aftermath of the war. Further stories emerged of fly-by-night schools offering specious courses just to attract veterans and cash in on the benefits windfall.[30]

The scrutiny of the 1944 G.I. Bill at the beginning of the 1950s took on an increasingly prescient tone. By the time Teague's committee handed their report to Congress in February 1952, the Cold War had already turned hot in Korea, and discussions had already begun over the possibility of resurrecting the program for a new cadre of veterans. At first, the government was reluctant to extend benefits to participants of an undeclared war. One month after the war's start, the House Veterans Committee rebuffed an attempt by Teague to pass a bill providing benefits for Korean

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[29] Quoted in the *New York Times*, January 24, 1981, 16.

[30] *Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964, Volume I*, (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1965), 1349.

veterans along the same lines as those offered World War II veterans. But as Korea devolved into a very real war in all but name, the calls for equitable benefits grew louder.

By March of 1952, Congress had tabled thirty-three separate bills designed to extend benefits to Korean conflict veterans.[31] The three bills given greatest consideration in the House Veterans Affairs Committee differed in the amounts they offered and in the way the benefits were to be administered. H.R.6377 proposed an extension of the same benefits offered under original 1944 bill. Korean Conflict veterans would receive the same 500-dollar a year sum to pay for tuition and fees in addition to a seventy-five dollar a month stipend for living expenses. The American Legion, so instrumental in the passage of the original act, understandably favored this option. A second bill, H.R.5040, tabled by John Rankin, proposed that the government would pay only half of a veteran's tuition costs up to a total of 300 dollars. Rankin proposed a five-dollar increase in the monthly living stipend to offset the reduction in tuition benefits. The third proposal departed most radically from the original bill and proved to be the most contentious.

Based on his findings as head of the House investigation into the 1944 bill, Teague proposed a bill that contained one controversial position that he would stick to throughout his involvement in the veterans' benefits debates in the coming decades. Despite his professed unease with the "hell" that governments inflict upon their citizen-soldiers, Teague proved equally as concerned with the attempts to defraud the government uncovered by his committee. He came to believe that the best way to curb such fraudulent incidents would be to make any future payment of education benefits *directly* to the veteran themselves and not to the institutions. The veterans would then

[31] *New York Times*, March 16, 1952, E11.

have the discretion to spend their benefits at the institution of their choosing. This measure, Teague opined, would eliminate the incentive for institutions to raise their tuition rates while still giving veterans full discretion to choose their course of study. He incorporated this view into his own proposed Korean G.I. Bill, H.R.6425. Teague suggested that a fixed monthly sum of 110 dollars paid directly to the veteran should cover adequately all of the veteran's educational needs. As with all of the education benefit proposals, the monthly allowance increased depending on the number of dependants.

Teague's measure attracted immediate criticism. Some educators realized that veterans might favor lower cost public colleges instead of more expensive private institutions. The American Legion expressed concerns that under either Rankin or Teague's bills, the failure to pay tuition costs in full might discourage veterans from entering higher education.[32] The *New York Times* questioned whether the veterans might be forced to avoid courses that required higher out of pocket expenses for books or materials if they were forced to cover all of their expenses out of a fixed monthly sum.[33] Representatives of some colleges with higher tuition rates, understandably, feared that the rewards reaped under the original bill would be lowered substantially as veterans might favor more inexpensive options. Despite such criticism, the version of the bill that finally emerged from House Committee on Veterans Affairs at the end of May 1952 retained the central contested feature of Teague's bill that decreed that money for tuition should be paid directly to the veteran.

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

Before the bill went before Congress, some representatives and educators launched one final offensive to try to prevent its passage. Both Teague and Rankin stood behind the bill that emerged from the House Veterans Affairs Committee. But when they attempted to obtain a "closed rule" vote for the bill, whereby no amendments could be added, the House Rules Committee stalled. They insisted that the Committee on Veterans Affairs consider an amendment tabled by Illinois Republican Representative William Springer to add a direct tuition payment amendment to the bill. Teague called Springer's measure an assault on "the heart of my bill," and vowed to fight it. While the House stalled, officials at some private schools convened in an attempt to dissuade the House from passing Teague's measure. University of Southern California President Fred D. Fagg Jr. appealed to the heads of private institutions to write to Congress in support of Springer's amendment. Ultimately, the arguments against the bill made little impact. On June 5, the House voted by an overwhelming 361-1 to pass the bill. Even Springer voted for the bill. The only dissenting vote came from Maryland Republican James Devereux, a brigadier general who had spent almost all of World War II as a prisoner of war, who objected to the Rules Committee's decision to forbid amendments and limit debate on the bill to only forty minutes on the House floor. The Senate passed the bill by voice vote on June 28, and on July 16, President Truman signed Public Law 82-550, the Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952.[34]

The Korean G.I. Bill did not quite reach the generous heights of the 1944 bill. In part, the reason for this more parsimonious approach to benefits was a perception that the

[34] *Congress and the Nation, Vol. I*, 1348.

first G.I. Bill had been overly generous.[35] In congressional hearings on veterans benefits, some educators admitted that the economic need for a G.I. Bill following Korea would be far less than it had been after World War II. The expanding postwar economy seemed to offer more opportunities for veterans to reintegrate without the need for additional government assistance. A spokesman for the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities admitted that the "situation [was] entirely different from . . . the end of World War II."[36] In its final form, the Korean G.I. Bill offered benefits to veterans who served after June 27, 1950 until the official declaration of the end of the conflict (this date would come on January 31, 1955).

The 1952 bill provided education benefits of 110 dollars per month for a veteran with no dependants. This sum increased to 135 dollars for one dependant, 160 for two or more. Benefits could be claimed for a period equal to one-and-a half times the veteran's service up to a maximum of thirty-six months. As Teague had sought, veterans had to pay for all of their tuition costs, books, supplies, and living expenses out of their monthly stipend. Korean veterans also received similar home loan benefits to those offered World War II veterans. The provision for unemployment insurance remained, but Korean veterans had less time than their "52-20" predecessors to form a "club," receiving twenty-six dollars a month for only twenty-six weeks.

Veterans had received benefits in an inconsistent manner for centuries until the passage of the World War II G.I. Bill, but with the passage of similarly sweeping legislation for Korea veterans the government set a precedent and created a heightened

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[35] Olson, *G.I. Bill*, 106.
[36] Quoted in ibid.

expectation among future generations of veterans of what the nation owed them for their sacrifice during a time of war. Certainly most Vietnam veterans, when it came their turn to answer the nation's call, would have had some expectations of recompense for their service. But even though the Korean G.I. Bill helped set the precedent in terms of function and form of later G.I. bills, the passage of benefits for Vietnam veterans was by no means automatic. From the mid 1950s onwards, the debate over who should be eligible for benefits gained renewed impetus in the government. In particular, questions arose over whether benefits should continue to be offered to veterans who suffered no perceptible physical or economic harm from their military service. Few people denied that disabled veterans should receive recompense for their sacrifice. To that end, the government continued to extend disability benefits throughout the 1950s. But the provision of general benefits to all servicemen and women received far greater scrutiny.

On January 14, 1955 President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued Executive Order 10588 creating a special Commission on Veterans Pensions to "carry out a comprehensive study of the laws and policies pertaining to pension, compensation, and related non-medical benefits for our veterans and their dependants."[37] In a later letter of clarification, Eisenhower spoke of the need "for a constructive reappraisal of the standards under which such benefits should be provided." Noting the exponential growth of the veteran population and the growth of universal national welfare programs, Eisenhower noted, "It is our duty to arrange our affairs so that future generations will inherit an economic and social structure which is fundamentally sound and in which

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[37] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower,* "Letter to Omar Bradley from President Eisenhower," March 5, 1955.

obligations, including those owed to veterans and their survivors, are distributed equitably and not as an unwelcome burden."[38] As an old soldier, Eisenhower's motivation to reevaluate veterans' benefits sprang not from some desire to cheat the veteran from their dues. Instead, the Bradley Commission represented part of his broader economic agenda to reassess federal spending in an attempt to reduce the government's outlay and balance the budget.

Eisenhower also had strong ideological reasons to reexamine veterans' benefits. Despite his conservative convictions, he accepted that he could never roll back the New Deal and once told his brother, "Should any party attempt to abolish social security and eliminate labor laws and farm subsidies, you would not hear of that party again."[39] Indeed, Eisenhower added over 10 million to social security rolls and increased public housing programs.[40] He did, however, object to what he saw as the pandering to special interest groups of his predecessor Harry S. Truman. Eisenhower thought that Truman had given too many concessions to farmers, unions, and racial liberals. Decrying overt governmental interference in the economy, Eisenhower noted, "a paternalistic government . . . can gradually destroy, by suffocation in the immediate advantage of subsidy, the will of a people to maintain a high degree of individual responsibility."[41] Harking back to the republican spirit of Thomas Jefferson, Eisenhower believed that such groups should set aside their selfish interests for the sake of the common good, aiming for

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Quoted in Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

[40] Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Volume II, The Presidency* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 158.

[41] Quoted in Chester Pach and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (University Press of Lawrence, Kansas, 1991), 31.

what one biographer describes as a "corporate commonwealth, . . . a harmonious society free of class conflict, selfish acquisitiveness and divisive party politics."[42] Eisenhower expressed this view in his attempts to lower farm subsidies and his philosophy led him to question the ever expanding slate of benefits and special privileges offered veterans. In questioning how far the government's generosity should extend to its protectors of freedom at the expense of other sectors of society, Eisenhower shared a similar ideological heritage with Jefferson and FDR. Eisenhower hoped that the Bradley Commission could develop a new guiding philosophy that would make veterans benefits more equitable for all of society.

For more than a year, the Bradley Commission gathered demographic data on the nation's veterans, interviewed public officials concerned with veterans' benefits, and sent out thousands of questionnaires to veterans to gauge their readjustment needs. Their final report became one of the most important documents on veterans' benefits to emerge in the mid twentieth century.[43] The Commission examined the philosophy behind continuing veteran pensions, and all veterans' benefits in general. Its findings influenced public policy for the next decade and had a direct bearing on the debates surrounding the Vietnam era G.I. Bills.

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[42] Richard Damms, *The Eisenhower Presidency, 1953-1961* (London: Longman, 2002), 7. For further discussion of Eisenhower's economic and political philosophy see Eisenhower's memoir, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), particularly pages 488-489, and Raymond J. Saulnier's "The Philosophy Underlying Eisenhower's Economic Policies" in John P. King, ed., *Dwight D. Eisenhower: Soldier President, Statesman* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

[43] *Veterans' Benefits in the United States: A Report to the President by the President Commission on Veterans' Pensions* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956). The Commission's report is referred to hereafter as the *Bradley Report.*

Eisenhower appointed Omar N. Bradley to head the commission. Following his success in leading the First Army in the D-Day Normandy invasion, Bradley enjoyed an illustrious postwar career. He served as the head of the Veterans Administration from 1945 through 1948 and guided the agency through its difficult task of helping over fifteen million World War II veterans reintegrate back into society. Bradley went on to serve as Army Chief of Staff in 1948, became the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1949, and attained the rank of five-star general in 1950.[44]

Initially slated to submit their findings on November 1, 1955, the Bradley Commission delayed giving their report to the White House until April 23, 1956. Noting that previous benefits had accrued in a somewhat ad hoc fashion, the Commission "endeavored to develop a philosophy and guiding principles, on the basis of which our national obligations to veterans can be discharged generously."[45] Some of the guidelines suggested by the Commission in determining the government's obligation to veterans included the idea that benefits should continue to be used as a means of "equalizing significant sacrifices that result directly from wartime military service."[46] To that end, the Commission lauded the efforts of the G.I. Bill as the "best way to meet the Government's obligation to nondisabled war veterans" by offering "constructive assistance when it is most needed."[47] The G.I. Bill, the report concluded, "as a whole has fully discharged the Government's obligation to nondisabled veterans and has provided

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[44] Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983).

[45] *Bradley Report*, 10.

[46] Ibid., 10.

[47] Ibid., 14.

benefits that in many cases more than balanced any handicaps resulting from military service."[48]

But the Commission also noted that the "rehabilitation of disabled veterans and their reintegration into useful economic and social life should be our primary objective."[49] With that in mind, the Commission recommended some controversial measures to reduce the government's commitment to veterans who suffered no perceptible hardships as a result of military service. The Commission stated, "Military service in time of war or peace is an obligation of citizenship and should not be considered inherently a basis of future Government benefits." While recognizing that military service required some sacrifice on the part of individuals, the Commission found that finite readjustment benefits such as the G.I. Bill proved sufficient compensation for veterans for their service but that ongoing benefits such as pensions constituted a "special privilege."[50] Moreover, the Commission argued that the establishment of a comprehensive social security system in the United States precluded the need for generous veteran pensions.

The Commission also called for restrictions on the eligibility of veterans for future readjustment benefits. Specifically, the Commission warned against providing a full slate of benefits for veterans serving during peacetime. With veterans and their dependants comprising almost half of the entire population by the mid 1950s, the costs of such a measure would prove prohibitive. Consequently, the Commission proposed that "the Government's postservice obligation to peacetime ex-servicemen should be limited

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[48] Ibid., 15.
[49] Ibid., 11.
[50] Ibid., 10.

to compensation and assistance for such significant disabilities as may arise directly out of military service."[51] Peacetime veterans should continue to receive medical care and re-employment assistance, but the Commission argued, "military service does not involve sufficient interruption to the educational progress of servicemen to warrant a continuation of a special educational program for them."[52]

The Bradley Commission fulfilled its brief to reexamine veterans' benefits in the context of the nation's changing demographic and economic situation. Their proposals sought to establish a realistic framework in which to craft future benefit packages. They agreed with the long established traditions of providing medical care to veterans and enacting measures to compensate them for time lost from civilian life. But the Commission also realized that given the sheer number of veterans in the nation and the growth of general welfare programs there ought to be limits to the government's obligation. In practical terms this meant a reevaluation of the tradition of offering ongoing pensions and a new philosophy of grading entitlements based on how much a veteran has actually suffered from military service and how much their life had been disrupted.

Any attempt to interfere with veterans' benefits invariably raises the ire of the veterans' organizations. The American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars make it their primary objective to ensure that veterans retain their special privilege status. The VFW did not even wait for the publication of the *Bradley Report* before denouncing it. At the end of August 1955, 20,000 VFW followers marched through Boston during their

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[51] Ibid., 16.
[52] Ibid., 17.

annual national encampment in front of an estimated 500,000 spectators. That same day, the VFW adopted a resolution which castigated the government for failing to enact increases in "hospital facilities and in compensation and pension benefits for veterans." The VFW then claimed that the Bradley Commission had been convened "with the obvious purpose of finding ways and means to reduce veteran benefits."[53] Two days after the Bradley Commission submitted its report, the House Veterans Affairs Committee shelved a benefits bill until they could consider the report. J. Addington Wagner, the American Legion's National Commander, responded by calling the action "unwise, unnecessary and illogical." In July 1956, the Legion spewed even more vitriol, passing a resolution that denounced the *Bradley Report* as "an abortive monstrosity."[54]

Some veteran organizations took a more levelheaded view of the *Bradley Report*. In a 1957 letter to the *New York Times*, Kenneth Birkhead, Executive Director of the progressive American Veterans Committee, called for a more rational approach to veterans benefits when Congress debated H.R.52, a measure that would have given the same benefits to a veteran with flat feet as a veteran with a 90 percent service related disability.[55] Deriding the lobbying actions of established older veterans' organizations such as the American Legion, Birkhead noted, "the bill was pressured through Congress by the old-line veterans' organizations who are more concerned with the amount of money they can get from the Government than with providing for real needs." Casting

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[53] *New York Times*, August 31, 1955, 14.

[54] Ibid., July 22, 1956, 6.

[55] For background on the liberal views of the AVC, see Robert Francis Saxe, "'Citizens First, Veterans Second': The American Veterans Committee and the Challenge of Postwar 'Independent Progressives,'" *War & Society* (Australia) 2004 22(2): 75-94, and Robert L. Tyler, Robert, "The American Veterans Committee: Out of a Hot War and Into the Cold," *American Quarterly* 1966 18(3): 419-436.

his constituents as the "thinking veterans" versus the "professional veterans" Birkhead agreed with the Bradley Commission's central contention that veterans' benefits needed to be more rationally thought out and more related to actual need. He concluded, "Understanding of these problems by thinking veterans and citizens who are not blinded by the brass of some self serving veterans' organizations can have a decisive effect in assuring that Congress will not bow again to this pressure."[56] Indeed, there were signs that Congress was beginning to change its perspective on veterans' benefits.

Soon after the release of the *Bradley Report*, the House Committee on Veterans Affairs narrowly passed H.R.7886, a bill calling for an increase in pensions for World War I veterans from just over sixty-six dollars a month for those under the age of sixty-five to eighty-five dollars a month. Those over the age of sixty-five would receive 105 dollars a month instead of just over seventy-eight dollars a month. The American Legion lobbied hard for the passage of the bill. But Olin Teague, still head of the Committee, opposed the measure on the grounds that it contravened the principles laid out by the Bradley Commission. The House eventually passed a watered down version of the bill, but the Senate took no action before the adjournment of the 84th Congress, effectively killing the measure. Other veteran groups opposed the bill as well. The Disabled American Veterans and AMVETS organizations both denounced the measure for its emphasis on providing benefits for able-bodied veterans potentially at the expense of those with greater needs. The influence of the *Bradley Report* reached beyond Congress and the veterans' organizations.

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[56] *New York Times*, September 1, 1957, 106.

Unsurprisingly, given Eisenhower's disdain for the government's privileging of specific groups in society, the Commission's findings found a receptive audience in the White House. Eisenhower expressed his disapproval of H.R.7886, and in his annual budget message to Congress in January 1958 he called for a reconsideration of "laws providing veterans benefits and services which now overlap other growing public benefit and welfare programs."[57] The following year, he recommended a needs test for determining eligibility for veterans' pensions. In his 1961 Budget message, Eisenhower recognized that peacetime veterans should remain a separate category in determining readjustment benefits because they "undergo fewer rigors and hazards than their combat comrades."[58] Because of the minimal disruption to their civilian lives and educational opportunities while serving in peacetime conditions, Eisenhower accepted the Commission's contention that readjustment benefits to peacetime veterans should be curtailed.

At the end of his presidency, Eisenhower sought to put these principles into practice. Under the aegis of the *Bradley Report*, for the first time since Franklin Roosevelt's hastily enacted and quickly repealed Economy Act of 1933, the White House sought to cut veterans' benefits. In April 1959, Eisenhower submitted a proposal to Congress to tie future pension payments to the economic needs of veterans. With some modification, Congress accepted the President's proposals. Under Public Law 86-211,

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[57] *Public Papers, Eisenhower,* "Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1959," January 13, 1958.

[58] *Public Papers, Eisenhower,* "Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1961," January 18, 1960.

the new pension system took into account such factors as a veteran's annual income, net worth, and spouse's income in determining eligibility and rates.

The debates surrounding the veterans' benefits should have had a limited impact on the passage of a G.I. Bill for Vietnam veterans. Even the Bradley Commission accepted the need for readjustment benefits for veterans that had served in a combat zone. But the Vietnam veteran's access to benefits became complicated by attempts in Congress at the end of the 1950s and early 1960s to pass a Cold War G.I. Bill that would offer benefits to *all* veterans irrespective of when and where they served.

On July 29, 1959 the Senate voted on a bill, S.1138, to provide education benefits and housing assistance to aid peacetime veterans. Senator Ralph Yarborough, another Texas Democrat and World War II veteran, led the crusade for the bill. Initially, he proposed to give veterans a monthly living stipend of 110 dollars for higher education, but an eleventh-hour amendment converted these stipends to loans if a veteran failed to remain in the top 50 percent of their class. The bill gave similar benefits to those offered Korean Conflict veterans but without mustering out pay. A veteran also had to serve six months or more instead of the ninety day requirement for Korean veterans to become eligible. The bill also offered home and farm loans, but not business loans. Yarborough opened the debate on the floor of the Senate by resurrecting the argument that all citizens should compensate those who serve in the military. He argued that as a result of the ongoing "threat of war" created by the Cold War "it becomes a matter of great national concern when some individuals have to carry a grossly disproportionate share of the

burden of citizenship."[59] Yarborough tried immediately to head off the ubiquitous cries that veterans' benefits verged on selective welfarism by noting that the G.I. Bill, with its provision of training benefits, was "typically American" because of its "emphasis on self-help individual initiative."[60] Samuel James Ervin, Democratic senator from North Carolina led the opposition to the bill on the Senate floor. His arguments emphasized the considerable costs of Yarborough's bill. Claiming to speak on "behalf of a group of Americans who are sometime[s] forgotten, namely the American taxpayers," Ervin warned of the dangers of creating "the greatest debt ever thrust upon posterity by any generation."[61] Despite its obvious costs, the bill passed the Senate by a vote of 57-31. Forty-eight Democrats and only nine Republicans voted for the bill. Reflecting their different economic philosophies, twenty-one of the more fiscally conservative Republicans and ten (mainly southern) Democrats voted against it.

In a letter to the *New York Times*, Yarborough further made his case that the need for a peacetime draft during the Cold War necessitated a package of veterans' benefits. He claimed that because so many men could obtain college and marital deferments "only about 45 percent of our young men must bear the burden of military service" and should be compensated for time lost from civilian life. "The cold war G.I. Bill," he went on, "corrects this injustice by helping these young veterans continue their education after its substantial interruption."[62]

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[59] *Congressional Record-Senate*, July 29, 1959, 13797.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 13800.
[62] Quoted in the *New York Times*, August 22, 1959, 16.

Outside of the Senate, few others shared Yarborough's enthusiasm for a Cold War G.I. Bill. The veteran community failed to mobilize behind the measure. Only the VFW actively supported the bill. Other veteran organizations seemed reluctant to share their hard-fought rewards with those who had never faced fire. Most importantly, the House remained unconvinced by Yarborough's arguments. The Senate-passed bill went to the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, but despite extensive hearings it was never reported out and died in committee.

The bill received a cool reception in the White House. Both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations used the conclusions of the *Bradley Report* to justify their opposition, claiming that peacetime service did not incur enough sacrifice on the part of veterans to justify readjustment benefits. In his budget message to Congress in January 1960, Eisenhower proclaimed:

> Peacetime ex-servicemen are recognized as being in a different category from wartime veterans because of the different conditions under which they serve. Those who serve in peacetime undergo fewer rigors and hazards than their usual comrades. The disruption of their educational loans and careers is minimized under peacetime selective service procedures. While on active service they now receive substantial pay and benefits, and they return to civilian life under more favorable conditions after receiving valuable training while in service. . . .
>
> I oppose the establishment of special educational and loan guarantee programs for peacetime ex-servicemen. Such benefits are not justified because they are not supported by the conditions of military service.[63]

Eisenhower was not averse to plowing federal dollars into higher education. Indeed, he instigated and signed into law one of the most significant education bills ever passed to that point, the 1958 National Defense Education Act. Up until the 1944 G.I. Bill, the

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[63] *Public Papers, Eisenhower,* "Annual Budget to Congress: Fiscal Year 1961," January 18, 1960.

federal government had played only a limited role in funding education preferring instead to keep it a state and local issue. The few notable exceptions included the 1862 Morrill Act which offered land grants for the establishment of colleges, the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act which encouraged vocational programs, several emergency New Deal programs and the 1940 Lanham Act which offered assistance to "impacted areas" needing help accommodating military installations.[64] Repeatedly, in the aftermath of World War II, attempts to pass bills on Capitol Hill providing for widespread aid to education ran afoul of states'-rights Southerners, Northern fiscal conservatives, and Catholic lobbyists who feared that such funds would only go to public schools.[65] The government made further encroachments into education in 1950 passing the College Housing Act which offered low interest loans for college housing construction and by establishing the National Science Foundation which offered students grants for scientific research. Several times during the 1950s Congress expanded the provisions of the Lanham Act. None of these measures came close to Eisenhower's National Defense Education Act in promoting federal involvement in higher education.

The NDEA offered loans to promising students in the areas of math, science, and foreign languages.[66] The act also provided funds for summer training for the nation's science teachers and the production of textbooks by eminent scientists. The act aimed to revitalize the nation's scientific and technological base in the wake of the Soviet launching of Sputnik in October 1957. One Eisenhower scholar notes that the act

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[64] *Congress and the Nation, Vol. I,* 1196.

[65] Ibid., 1195.

[66] See Barbara Barksdale Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War: The Sputnik Crisis and the 1958 National Defense Education Act* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

"established the precedent of federal involvement in education," while another calls it "the most important federal contribution to schooling since the land grant colleges were established."[67] Therefore, rather than opposing government funds to higher education, Eisenhower's opposition to a new G.I. Bill came more from his ideological opposition to bestowing the government's largesse on veterans that had merely performed their civic duty and suffered no real hardship as a result. Deeming peacetime service as unworthy of great reward, Eisenhower saw a more pressing need to nurture the nation's scientific community than to pass a peacetime G.I. Bill. The contrast between the warm reception given the 1944 and 1952 G.I. bills in Washington and the blunt rejection of the peacetime bill outside of the Senate revealed that the House and White House clearly placed peacetime veterans in a different category to wartime veterans in determining federal obligations to military personnel.

Similarly, despite voting for the S.1138 whilst serving in the Senate in 1959, John F. Kennedy gave no further support to such a measure after entering the White House. In one of his few public statements on veterans' benefits he reiterated the *Bradley Report*'s main contention that, "Our first concern in veterans programs is that adequate benefits be provided for those disabled in the service of their country."[68] The Veterans Administration also opposed widespread benefits to peacetime veterans. VA Administrator J.S. Gleason indicated that his agency favored proposals circulating on Capitol Hill to extend vocational readjustment benefits to disabled veterans, but he

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[67] Damms, *Eisenhower Presidency*, 68, and William O Neill, "Eisenhower and American Society" in Gunter Bischof and Stephen Ambrose (eds.) *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment* (Baton Rouge" Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 105.

[68] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, John F. Kennedy*, "Annual Budget Message to the Congress: Fiscal Year 1963," January 18, 1962,

agreed with President Kennedy that such benefits should not be offered to non-disabled peacetime veterans.[69]

The peacetime G.I. Bill resurfaced in the Senate on a couple of further occasions at the start of the 1960s. S.349, the Veterans Readjustment Act of 1961 received a brief outing on August 24, 1962. Essentially, the bill contained similar provisions to the one passed in the Senate in 1959, but the 1961 version did not even get that far. A succession of senators rose to argue against the bill. Ohio Democrat Frank Lausche highlighted the lack of support in the White House, the VA and in the veteran community. Strom Thurmond (D-SC) cited the opposition to the bill in the Bureau of the Budget (BOB) and in the Department of Defense (DOD). Thurmond read a letter to the Veterans Subcommittee of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare from the BOB highlighting the training and skills a soldier can attain while on service and arguing, "compared with wartime, the draft has a lesser impact on the disruption of education and career plans."[70] Thurmond also read a letter from the Department of Defense that revealed their fears that extensive benefits would hinder their manpower requirements. According to the DOD, "Programs of educational and vocational assistance encourage personnel to leave military service immediately after accruing the maximum benefits which can be gained. This results in a serious handicap to the Armed Forces in their efforts to attract and retain

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[69] Letter to Representative Lister Hill (D-AL) from J.S. Gleason, May 19, 1961, Folder "The Early Proposals," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background New G.I. Bill, 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas. Veterans with service-connected disabilities did receive more liberal benefits at during the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations.

[70] Letter from the Bureau of Budget to the Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Veterans' Affairs Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, entered into the Congressional Record by Strom Thurmond, *Congressional Record-Senate*, August 24, 1962, 17524.

qualified personnel on a career basis."[71] Yarborough read several letters in support of the measure, but after several hours of debate the Senate shelved the bill without it even going to a vote.

Finally, in April 1963, the Senate Subcommittee on Veterans' Affairs Committee on Labor and Public Welfare held hearings on S.5, a further attempt to pass a peacetime G.I. Bill. Here again, the VA Administrator Gleason reiterated his views that "service under current conditions does not present on a widespread basis the same rigors and hazards as does wartime service; . . . I do not believe these readjustment programs, education, training and loan, are needed at the present time."[72] The lack of support among the VA, veterans' organizations, and the White House killed any further proposals to introduce a new G.I. Bill.

Many of the peacetime veterans understandably favored any measure that might bring them into the fold of the privileged. David R. Davies, a first-year student at the Wisconsin State University in Whitewater served with the army from October 1959 through February 1962. In July of 1964, Davies wrote President Lyndon Johnson to explain his financial struggles after leaving the service. He complained that the army had provided him no special skills and that he was forced to delay his "ultimate goal" of attending college and had to take up a series of menial jobs. Speaking up in support of S.5, Davies wrote, "I sincerely hope that your administration will review the potential

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[71] Letter from the Department of Defense to the Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Veterans' Affairs Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, entered by Strom Thurmond in ibid.

[72] Statement of the Administrator of Veterans Affairs Before the Subcommittee on Veterans' Affairs Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate, April 10, 1963, Folder "The Early Proposals," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, 1966. LBJ Library.

value of theis [sic] vitally needed legislation. I think it would be tragic for [a] bill of this kind to be perpetually by-passed by seemingly more important legislation."[73] The mother of one concerned veteran wrote Johnson to inform him "Were I not employed, it would be impossible for our son to continue his education. We are not alone in this, there are many young men who having served their country, would like to go to school."[74]

Early on in his presidency, Johnson gave little indication of supporting a new G.I. Bill. He did, however, mark the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the original G.I. Bill with a ringing endorsement of its contribution to society. "The G.I. Bill," he wrote,

> increased the strength of our Nation by enlarging the opportunities of our people. . . . On this occasion, let us remember the valor of the men and women for whom the bill was intended—those who led us to victory in war. Let us also recall the vision of those who proposed and passed this legislation. And let us also, at this time, renew our own commitment to carry forward the work of peace which they so successfully began.[75]

When he made these comments, the Commander-in-Chief had his troops scattered throughout the globe, but there seemed no immediate reason to consider a new G.I. Bill. To be sure, the situation in South Vietnam had deteriorated rapidly since Johnson took over the presidency. But even in this most dangerous of the Cold War's contact points, the United States had only several thousand personnel stationed and few anticipated the massive investment of men and material that would follow. Over the next ten years, the

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[73] Letter to President Johnson from David R Davies, July 14, 1964, Folder "LE/VA3," Box, 163, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislation Gen LE/VA 2 11/22/63, LBJ Library.

[74] Letter to President Johnson from Josephine Natale, May 19, 1964, Folder "LE/VA3," Box, 163, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislation Gen LE/VA 2 11/22/63, LBJ Library

[75] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson*, "Statement by the President on the 20th Anniversary of the G.I. Bill of Rights," June 22, 1964.

government would call on the services of over three million of its citizens to serve in Southeast Asia. The debates over funding for veterans of the conflict would resurrect questions of military obligation and the enormous costs of veterans' benefits. The administrations of Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Gerald Ford would attempt to balance the problem of giving soldiers equitable rewards for service with the nation's social and economic needs. Each president would bring different economic philosophies and ideological views to the veteran question; to a varying degree, each one would attract criticism from the press, the public, and the veterans' community for their treatment of veterans. With the escalation of the Vietnam War, a new and bitter chapter in the long history of veteran benefits loomed.

Chapter 2

YARBOROUGH'S CRUSADE: THE 1966 "COLD WAR" G.I. BILL

> I appeal to you to include the five million veterans of the Cold War in your plans for the Great Society. They are the only Americans denied a fair opportunity in life by their own government.
>
> Senator Ralph Yarborough

> it doesn't seem to me that you ought to have to go into uniform and go to boot camp, and spend 2 or 3 years in the service in order for your Government to have an interest in your education. . . . I think we just must not rest until each child—GI or no GI, boy or girl, rich or poor—has the opportunity to get the kind of education that he needs and that his country needs for him to have in order to defend it.
>
> President Lyndon B. Johnson

By the end of 1964, the United States had over 23,000 service personnel stationed in South Vietnam and nearly 150 men had already given their lives. As the nation's crusade gathered momentum in Southeast Asia, Ralph Yarborough saw the opening to re-launch his own crusade to secure a new G.I. Bill of Rights. Throughout his public career, Yarborough had always displayed an affinity for the oppressed. In his early career as district judge for the Fifty-third Judicial District in Austin, Texas he consistently ruled against racial discrimination, corporate greed, and political corruption. He was a firm supporter of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal during the 1930s. During World War II he traveled with Patton's Third Army across northern Europe as part of the Judge Advocate General's office. He later became military governor of the Honshu province during the postwar occupation of Japan. Although at thirty-eight he was too old to be drafted when Pearl Harbor was attacked, Yarborough considered it his civic duty to serve. Following the war, he returned to public life and remained an ardent supporter of the New Deal's liberal legacy even as Texas politics veered further right at the end of the

1940s and 1950s. After three unsuccessful—but close—runs at the governorship of Texas, Yarborough became the junior senator for Texas behind Lyndon Johnson in 1957. He was one of only four senators from the former Confederate states to refuse to sign the "Southern Manifesto" supported by 101 House representatives and senators in 1956 in opposition to the Supreme Court's Brown versus the Board of Education decision. In 1957, he and Johnson also became the first senators from Texas to vote for a civil rights bill.[1]

When he became Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee of the Labor and Public Welfare Committee Yarborough found a new noble cause. The Senate did not yet have the equivalent of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, and so Senate deliberations of veterans' bills came through Yarborough's committee. Despite his previous failures at getting a Cold War G.I. Bill passed, in 1964 he chose the occasion of Veterans Day to telegram Lyndon Johnson to urge his consideration of a new program of education benefits for veterans. Cleverly appealing to Johnson's burgeoning sense of social justice, he wrote, "On this Veteran's Day I appeal to you to include the five million veterans of the Cold War in your plans for the Great Society. They are the only Americans denied a fair opportunity in life by their own government."[2] On January 6, 1965, Yarborough again put his ideas into practice as he introduced yet another Cold War G.I. Bill, S.9. Patterned after the Korean Conflict G.I. Bill and closely resembling his

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[1] Patrick Cox, *Ralph W. Yarborough: The People's Senator* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 150. Lyndon Johnson, Estes Kefauver, and Albert Gore Sr. were the other three southern senators to vote against the "Southern Manifesto."

[2] Telegram from Ralph Yarborough to Lyndon Johnson, November 11, 1964, Folder "LE/VA 3," Box 163, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislation Gen LE/VA 2 11/22/63, LBJ Library.

previous attempts at a Cold War G.I. Bill, S.9 offered educational and vocational assistance to veterans that had served between January 31, 1955 and July 1, 1967 if they had served for more than 180 days and left the service in good standing. Benefits would be paid for a period equal to 1.5 times the length of service. The single veteran would be able to claim 110 dollars a month for education, 135 dollars if they claimed one dependant. The day after submitting the bill, Yarborough wrote Johnson to remind him, "No other group in our society has done as much for their government for so little, at so great a cost to themselves."[3] He also took his message to the press, outlining his hope for "A Fair Deal for the Cold War Soldier" in an article for *Harper's Magazine*. In the article, Yarborough called for public support for the new bill as he urged "a great many Americans to demand it—in the name of both justice and common sense."[4] Arguing for the potential economic benefits of a new bill, Yarborough noted that the original G.I. Bill had provided the nation approximately "625,000 engineers, 375,000 teachers, 165,000 natural and physical scientists, and 220,000 workers in medicine and related fields."[5] In an argument that would resurface repeatedly in the debates over veteran funding to follow, he claimed that the extra earning potential of those trained would ensure that by 1970, the G.I. Bill would have paid for itself because of the extra income taxes paid back to the government. The G.I. Bill, he concluded, represented "one of the government's

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[3] Letter to Lyndon Johnson from Ralph Yarborough, January 7, 1965, Folder "LE/VA 11/22/63-12/31/65," Box 161, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislation Ex. LE/VA 2 11/22/63, LBJ Library.

[4] Ralph Yarborough, "A Fair Deal for the Cold War Soldier," *Harper's Magazine*, January 1965, 81.

[5] Ibid.

few profit-making ventures."[6] Finally, he suggested that such a program could eliminate the millions of dollars paid out in unemployment compensation to veterans discharged without any easily marketable skills.

Despite such arguments, Johnson remained unmoved. One internal White House memo laid out the administration's five-point opposition.[7] The last three of the five points were pragmatic. Point number three made the observation that there was no massive demobilization as had occurred after World War II and that most veterans acquired some marketable skills while in service, therefore there was less need to help veterans readjust to civilian life. Point number four noted that veterans' organizations had little interest in the new legislation as they tended to devote their efforts to securing benefits for "hot-war veterans." Point number five reiterated the Department of Defense position that a peacetime G.I. Bill might dissuade service personnel from making a career out of the military. These last three arguments added little of substance to the debates that had already taken place in the wake of the Bradley Report. But points one and two revealed a more deep-seated philosophical opposition to a new G.I. Bill in the Johnson administration.

The first objection raised in the White House memo was that "An expansive program only for ex-servicemen undercuts the strategy of persuading the Congress to ensure full educational advantages for all."[8] The cost of a new G.I. Bill threatened the administration's plans for universal education programs such aid as grants, loans, and

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Memorandum for Bill D. Moyers from Phillip S. Hughes, December 15, 1964, Folder "Initial Administration Opposition and Substitutes," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

[8] Ibid.

work-study programs. Johnson's attempts to transform America into a Great Society contained numerous proscriptions to aid those citizens still marginalized because of their race, lack of education, or endemic poverty. Through federal legislation and programs as the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and Medicare and Medicaid, Johnson hoped to refocus the nations' resources to help those citizens most greatly in need. He did not count peacetime veterans among them.

Heavily influenced by the social programs of the New Deal, Johnson wanted his Great Society to provide every citizen a more equitable share of the nation's considerable wealth. He saw education as an integral way of achieving this goal. According to biographer Irving Bernstein, Johnson believed that education "offered equality of opportunity, a level playing field, to young people who lived in poverty, to blacks, to Mexican-Americans, and to women, an appealing concept to a democratic populist."[9] With federal investment directed at the sectors of society that need most assistance, education could give every American the opportunity to better their lives, irrespective of their social condition. In a speech delivered in Boca Raton in October 1964, Johnson outlined his vision for the future of higher education in America when he called for "a new future of full equity in educational opportunity for all Americans." He added:

> advanced education is no longer a luxury just to be enjoyed by the child of the banker, or by the children of fortunate families. . . . To deny it to the children of poverty not only denies the most elementary democratic equality, it perpetuates

[9] Irving Bernstein, *Guns or Butter: The Presidency of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 183.

> poverty as a national weakness. And it denies our democracy and our great free enterprise system of government.[10]

The administration feared that providing education benefits solely for ex-servicemen and women might jeopardize more universal education programs that would benefit those with a greater need than the average peacetime veteran.

The second objection outlined in the memo more clearly reflected Great Society ideology as the administration protested, "The G.I. Bill approach is not selective—not according to need, not according to ability, not according to motivation."[11] The original G.I. Bill had unquestionably turned veterans into a privileged class. But the government and the public accepted the provision of such rewards because those veterans had faced fire. A peacetime bill might upset Johnson's goal of creating a more equal society by unfairly rewarding those veterans whose lives had not been seriously impaired by service. For Johnson, there still existed many other sectors of society that were far more deserving of federal support. As with many of his social programs, Johnson harked back to the New Deal and the same universalist approach to veterans benefits adopted by Franklin Roosevelt. Like Roosevelt, Johnson questioned whether veterans—especially peacetime veterans—should be placed on a pedestal when the needs of so many other sectors of society for government aid seemed more pressing. Later in his Boca Raton speech, Johnson highlighted the success of the original bill, but only to illustrate the potential of providing universal education benefits. He praised "The proud achievement of the GI bill," but added:

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[10] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson*, "Remarks in Boca Raton at the Dedication of Florida Atlantic University," October 25, 1964.

[11] Ibid.

> it doesn't seem to me that you ought to have to go into uniform and go to boot camp, and spend 2 or 3 years in the service in order for your Government to have an interest in your education. And yet there is not a Member of Congress today that would look back on that GI bill and say, "We made a mistake in making that great adventure and that great decision." The GI bill challenges us to programs of loans and scholarships enabling every young man and woman who has the ability to move beyond the high school level. So I think we just must not rest until each child—GI or no GI, boy or girl, rich or poor—has the opportunity to get the kind of education that he needs and that his country needs for him to have in order to defend it.[12]

As his legislative agenda soon proved, Johnson was not averse to throwing the weight of the government behind those who needed extra assistance, but he remained unconvinced that peacetime service justified such benevolence.

As Yarborough tried to gain momentum for a new G.I. Bill, Johnson busied himself trying to push through one of the most significant measures of his Great Society. The Higher Education Act of 1965 promised to give teeth to Johnson's dream of universal education. In one dramatic stroke, the act overturned centuries of federal reluctance to getting involved in higher education. The act gave direct scholarships to those students demonstrating financial need and offered federal insurance on student loans and subsidies for interest on the loans. Students from middle and lower income families could benefit from the act's work-study provisions whereby the government would cover the majority of the costs of employing students in university or community service positions. In addition, the act offered funds for universities to improve their buildings and facilities and aimed to improve quality of the nation's teachers by establishing the Teacher Corps.[13]

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Hugh Davis Graham, *The Uncertain Triumph: Federal Education Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Years* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

Johnson's desire to see the act pass tempered his support for introducing new benefits for veterans. Because of the enormous scope and cost of Higher Education Act, Johnson feared that Congress might be less likely to pass it if they were also presented with an expensive new G.I. Bill in addition. One week after Yarborough submitted S.9, Johnson made no mention of veterans in his message to Congress on his vision for education in America. He reiterated his universalistic approach to federal education assistance as he called for "better education to millions of disadvantaged youth who need it most [and] . . . the best educational equipment and ideas and innovations within reach of all students."[14] Similarly, in response to Yarborough's Veterans Day letter to Johnson, Lee White, Associate Special Council to the President, informed Yarborough that "greater assistance must be given to those potential college students who would not otherwise be able to secure higher education . . . of course, the proposed programs would not bar veterans."[15] Under legislation such as the Housing Act and Higher Education Act, veterans could claim federal assistance to help them reintegrate into society, and Johnson hoped these general benefits would suffice. Yarborough remained convinced that their sacrifice deserved more.

As Yarborough and the White House hit an impasse, the Veterans Administration worked on a compromise program. In the late fall of 1964, VA Administrator John S. Gleason, indicated that his agency was beginning to break with the administration and see the merits of Yarborough's proposals. On November 19, 1964 Gleason informed the

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[14] *Public Papers, Johnson*, "Special Message to the Congress: 'Toward Full Educational Opportunity,'" January 12, 1965.

[15] Letter to Ralph Yarborough from Lee C. White, January 15, 1965, Folder "Initial Administration Opposition and Substitutes-I," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

White House that the proposed new benefits could, in fact, serve to enforce the ideals of the Great Society and not betray them by helping to elevate the national education level. Gleason now accepted Yarborough's argument that military service incurred sacrifice on the part of the veterans. He informed Johnson's special assistant Bill Moyers that peacetime benefits "would be a valuable and feasible step in achieving the Great Society," and that "if the President sponsors legislation to provide Federal assistance generally in obtaining a college education, certainly persons who served their country, many times at a sacrifice, during the present 'Cold War' period should have a first claim to benefits."[16] Gleason acknowledged that Yarborough's previous proposals had been too costly, but he believed that a scaled down less expensive version, based on the Korean G.I. Bill model, might serve both the veterans needs and the social engineering goals of the administration.

Unfortunately for Yarborough and the veterans, in December 1964 Gleason resigned his post to return to private business before he could get anyone in the White House to listen to his proposals. Johnson replaced him with William Driver, a career VA employee who had served in uniform during World War II and Korea. Driver proved less open to Yarborough's proposals than Gleason had become by the end of his tenure. Early in 1965, Driver presented the VA's views on S.9 and sought to establish an alternative that more closely fit the administration's desires.

Driver informed senator Lister Hill, Chairman of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, that he did not agree with Yarborough that all post-Korea veterans should

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[16] Memo for Bill Moyers from J.S. Gleason, November 19, 1964, Folder "Initial Administration Opposition and Substitutes-I," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

be eligible for benefits. He reiterated the White House position that this objection "does not depreciate in any way the need for appropriate Federal legislation to improve the availability of education in this country," and endorsed the view that generally available federal student aid programs could compensate veterans adequately. Driver did at least raise the possibility of extending benefits for those veterans serving "in a period of hostility, or disabled by such service." Paying benefits to those who served during times of war tended to attract little opposition among the public or in political circles. Driver proposed that a new G.I. Bill could be enacted for those veterans serving in "warlike conditions" such as those developing in Vietnam or the Dominican Republic. [17]

Driver further tried to influence the perpetually obstructionist Bureau of the Budget of the merits of such a program. He told BOB director Kermit Gordon, "The immediate situation in Viet Nam creates a climate favorable to enactment of legislation . . . Realistically and equitably, I believe we must afford some additional recognition by way of wanted veterans' benefits to those members of our armed forces serving in such hot spots as Viet Nam."[18] Limiting benefits chronologically and geographically to areas designated by executive order as hostile would greatly reduce the cost and the political obstacles to enacting a new G.I. Bill. Similar proposals had already begun to enter Congress. On January 15, Massachusetts Republican Leverett Saltonstall introduced a

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[17] Letter to Lister Hill from the Office of the Administrator of Veterans Affairs, undated, Folder "Initial Administration Opposition and Substitutes-I," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

[18] Letter to Kermit Gordon from William Driver, February 12, 1965, Folder "Initial Administration Opposition and Substitutes-I," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

bill, S.520, that would make veterans of hotspots eligible for benefits similar to those offered under previous bills.

The BOB remained unmoved by the new proposals. The Bureau's Sam Hughes wrote Lee White to endorse the White House's objections to S.9 and also to repudiate the VA's compromise proposal. Hughes noted that since 1963 servicemen facing hazardous conditions had been given an additional fifty-five dollars a month in pay. The BOB deemed such payments as adequate compensation and saw no reason to extend educational and readjustment benefits. The only thing to which the BOB would consent was an increase in disability payment and the extension of a automobile grant to veterans injured in peacetime service. Hughes cautioned the White House to "firmly hold the line" against anything more generous and fight instead for broader public benefits.[19]

By the middle of 1965, the battle over S.9 heated up and the positions of all sides ossified. In May, Yarborough again wrote the White House to lay out his justification for S.9. This time he appealed to Johnson's political savvy. Claiming that the bill would likely pass both houses when put to a vote, Yarborough informed the President that the Republicans were positioning themselves as "the Party concerned with helping the fighting man." Support of S.9, he suggested, would allow the Democrats to regain the mantle of "friend to the GI." He ended his letter with the usual emotive plea that "Those

[19] Letter to Lee White from Sam Hughes, February 25, 1965, Folder "LE/VA 11/22/63-12/31/65," Box 161, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislation Ex. LE/VA 2 11/22/63, LBJ Library.

who are guarding freedom for all of us around the world, should come home to classrooms, not to unemployment lines and checks."[20]

In June, Yarborough submitted the final report of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare on S.9. Here Yarborough made his most thorough defense of the bill. Since the Bradley Commission, most opponents of a Cold War G.I. Bill argued that military service during peacetime did not incur enough sacrifice on the part of veterans to warrant readjustment benefits. In his committee report Yarborough systematically laid out the reasons why Cold War veterans did suffer disadvantages relative to non-veterans and, therefore, deserved additional compensation. He outlined the potential threats around the globe from the Soviet Union, China, and in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic as evidence that the definition of "peacetime" in the early 1960s was far different from the "peacetime" conditions of the 1930s. The presence of the first peacetime draft (other than 1940-1941) demanded that civilians faced significant disruptions in their lives and were denied the opportunities of the nation's "free enterprise, [and] individualistic way of life." Only the ongoing threat of war, noted Yarborough, demanded such sacrifices.[21]

Yarborough accepted the point that Cold War service did not involve comparable sacrifice to wartime service. This principle was reflected in the comparatively lesser amount of assistance offered under S.9. Under previous G.I. Bills, veterans had to serve

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[20] Letter to Lyndon Johnson from Ralph Yarborough, May 6, 1965, Folder "Initial Administration Opposition and Substitutes-I," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

[21] *Report of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare to Accompany S.9, the Cold War Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), 3.

ninety days before becoming eligible for benefits; S.9 decreed that the veterans serve 180 days. The bill also denied business loans and mustering out pay for Cold War veterans. Moreover, S.9 offered only 110 dollars per month to veterans, the same amount offered Korean veterans over a decade previously. This amount failed to take into account the rising costs of tuition and living expenses in the intervening years but perhaps more accurately reflected the lesser readjustment needs of peacetime veterans.

The committee report went on to reject calls for a benefits package that aided only those who served in hostile areas. Yarborough's justification was that the original G.I. Bill was not meant to be a reward for facing fire. Instead, it was designed to compensate veterans for time lost from civilian life. Military service necessitated such a sacrifice irrespective of where one served. In addition, because only a president could designate an "area of hostility," such a declaration "would be an admission of U.S. active military participation in the conflict and would be contrary to the foreign policy of the United States."[22] Eventually, the committee reported out S.9 favorably, but not unanimously. Five senators, led by New York Republican Jacob Javits offered a minority view that favored Leverett Saltonstall's hotspots bill over S.9. Javits and his fellow dissenters remained unconvinced by Yarborough's arguments and advocated instead benefits only for those "who have been subjected to the hazards of war," adding, "it is our sincere belief that in accord with long established American tradition it is these veterans who are entitled to these benefits."[23]

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[22] Ibid., 19.
[23] Ibid., 58.

By highlighting the very real sacrifices made by Cold War veterans in the report, Yarborough undercut effectively one of the main tenets of opposition to S.9. Combined with the economic, military, and social engineering arguments, S.9 was developing a lot of momentum on Capitol Hill. On July 19, 1965, the Senate voted on the measure. Walter Mondale opened the debate by relating how the G.I. Bill had helped him continue his education after service in the Korea conflict. He reiterated Yarborough's argument that the country was not really at peace because of Cold War tensions. Next, Hiram Leong Fong (R-HI), co-sponsor of S.9, praised Yarborough for having "steadfastly and tirelessly led the struggle for enactment of this vital program."[24] Fong attempted to allay many of the old fears over veterans' benefits. Praising the patriotism of those currently in uniform, he lauded the Cold War G.I.s as "the Minute Men of our times." He also reiterated that S.9 was first and foremost a readjustment bill and not a bonus offered to those merely carrying out their patriotic duty. "Every American," proclaimed Fong, "owes a duty to serve his country, but we as Members of Congress know that there is a corresponding responsibility on our part to take care of them."[25]

But following the obligatory patriotic epithets from co-sponsors of the bill, the debate turned more confrontational as several senators attempted to add amendments that would have changed the nature and philosophy of the bill. Leverett Saltonstall introduced the most contentions amendment. As his own bill, S.520, had advocated, his amendment attempted to limit eligibility for the benefits offered under S.9 to veterans of hotspots. Strom Thurmond spoke up in defense of this proposal. He questioned the

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[24] *Congressional Record-Senate*, July 19, 1965, 17304.
[25] Ibid., 17306.

justice of offering comparable benefits to those who had never faced fire, and raised doubts over whether such military service warranted the kinds of rewards being offered. According to Thurmond, "It is an honor for a man to serve his country in peace or in war. I do not look upon one who serves in peacetime as having his life jeopardized to the extent that his country owes him the same kind of consideration given to veterans of World War II or the Korean conflict."[26] Yarborough, Saltonstall, and Robert F. Kennedy engaged in a lively debate over the problems involved in placing such limitations on eligibility. Yarborough and Kennedy pressed Saltonstall on such questions as whether veterans in areas such as the Dominican Republic, or Berlin should receive benefits, or B-52 pilots flying out of Guam who might happen to crash in the South China Sea, an area technically outside of a declared war zone. The lack of clarity in defining such areas and conditions, claimed Yarborough, "shows the utter unworkability of the amendment."[27] Saltonstall finally called for a voice vote on the amendment. Thirty-six senators voted for it, with fifty-two against, and twelve not voting.

Two other amendments were then dismissed with far less discussion. Colorado Republican Peter Dominick had an amendment to limit benefits only to veterans of South Vietnam voted down by 53-31. In retrospect, this amendment had some merit because it could have led to higher benefits to those that needed it most, but it received little debate. Kentucky Republican John Cooper tried, as he had done in previous deliberations on Cold War G.I. Bills, to convert education benefits to loans instead of outright grants. This measure, Cooper suggested, would avoid rewarding those with no real interest in

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[26] Ibid., 17319.
[27] Ibid., 17322-17323.

higher education. Unconvinced, the Senate voted it down by a vote of 65-20. With the deliberations over, S.9 passed the Senate by a vote of 69-17. Yarborough had done his part, but this was not the first time a Cold War G.I. Bill had left the Senate. Now the administration and the House had to reverse their earlier obstinacy if the bill was to become law.

While the Senate moved forward apace, Johnson remained largely silent on the bill, preferring instead that the Veterans Administration promote the administration's views on Capitol Hill. In July, Johnson dismissed the veterans' benefits issue, claiming there was already enough legislation to keep Congress busy for the remainder of the session. Pressure for a strong Executive position came from many concerned parties. William Driver informed Johnson "a recommendation by the President is justified in principle and would be well received both by the Congress and by the public."[28] Bill Moyers, Special Assistant to the President, warned that the White House needed to develop a stronger position for fear that Yarborough's bill might "slip through unless we act."[29] Several concerned citizens also let their feelings known to Johnson. The mother of one Marine iformed Johnson that her son told her of his hopes for the passage of the Cold War G.I. Bill because "It would help a lot if we felt we had something to come back

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[28] Letter to Lyndon Johnson from William Driver, June 7, 1965, Folder "Initial Administration Opposition and Substitutes-I," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

[29] Memo for Douglass Cater from Bill Moyers, June 15, 1965, Folder "Initial Administration Opposition and Substitutes-I," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

to and felt that somebody gives a damn about us."[30] The uncle of another Vietnam soldier wrote Johnson, "a word from you to both Sen. Ralph Yarborough, and Rep. Olin Teague would hasten this bill [S.9] to a favorable conclusion."[31] Johnson still refused to make a strong stand on the veterans' benefits issue. Instead, he consented to a BOB request for an "informal and quiet working group to rack up alternatives" comprised of the agencies most affected by the bill.[32]

The informal group worked throughout the fall and gave numerous proscriptions for an administration-backed bill. The Bureau of the Budget, Veterans Administration, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and the Department of Defense passed around various proposals, and by December, the nucleus of an administration bill was taking shape. As the VA and the administration had always wanted, the new bill would limit eligibility to veterans serving in hostile areas. One suggestion for the wording of the bill specified that benefits should be "for the purpose of providing educational opportunities to those veterans whose readjustment problems have been accentuated by hazardous duty or service in areas of special hazard, such as Vietnam."[33] In a cost saving measure that clearly pleased the BOB, eligibility for benefits would be extended only as

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[30] Letter to Lyndon Johnson from Mrs. J.F. Grisillo, July 22, 1965, Folder "LE/VA 10/15/65-3/2/66," Box 162, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislation Ex. LE/VA 2, 11/22/63, LBJ Library.

[31] Letter to Lyndon Johnson from Roger C Walczyk, September 10, 1965, Folder "LE/VA 11/22/63-10/14/65," Box 162, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislation Ex. LE/VA 2, 11/22/63, LBJ Library.

[32] Letter to Lyndon Johnson from Charles L. Schultze, Director of the Bureau of the Budget, July 22, 1965, Folder "Initial Administration Opposition and Substitutes-II," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

[33] Memo to Douglass Cater from William Driver, December 15, 1965, Folder "Final Passage," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

far back as October 1, 1963. This date would have left all of the veterans who had served between January 31, 1955 and October 1, 1963 with no recourse to benefits. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare proposed that veterans who had not served in a combat area could receive a grant for college of up to 800 dollars per year or a lesser training allowance to be administered under the Manpower Development and Training Act.[34] While the administration refined its plans, the House had also begun to move, albeit rather slowly.

In 1960, Olin Teague's House Veterans Affairs Committee killed a previous attempt at a Senate-passed G.I. Bill, and in the fall of 1965 he seemed in no rush to pass the newer version. In a meeting with Sam Hughes of the BOB, White House special assistant Douglass Cater, and the VA's William Driver, Teague indicated that he would take no action on any education bill other than opening committee hearings.[35] Yarborough claimed that Teague's committee "had been dragging its feet purposely."[36] In part, the committee's sluggishness was logistic. An astonishing 133 different House members had submitted 139 bills regarding veterans' education benefits. Many of them duplicated each other, but Teague's committee still had some forty-seven to consider. Most offered either wide-ranging benefits similar to S.9, or limited benefits only to

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[34] Memo to Douglass Cater from Ralph K. Huitt, December 15, 1965 , Folder "Final Passage," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

[35] Letter to Lyndon Johnson from Charles L. Schultze, Director of the Bureau of the Budget, July 22, 1965, Folder "Initial Administration Opposition and Substitutes-II," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

[36] Quoted in the *Washington Daily News*, December 7, 1965, reprinted in Folder "LE/VA 10/15/65-3/2/66," Box 162, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislation Ex. LE/VA 2, 11/22/63, LBJ Library.

veterans of hotspots. But the delay also resulted in part from Teague's determination to stamp his authority on the proceedings.

Teague had a reputation as being "Mr. Veteran" on the Hill since making his name in the House investigations on the original G.I. Bill and exerted a considerable influence on veterans' affairs. Indeed, two of the veteran benefits bills in front of his committee came from Teague himself. The White House was aware of the Teague's ego. The BOB's Charles Schultze warned, "He would like the ball himself. He would just as soon have the Administration make only general statements about this and let his committee work the bill."[37] The problem for the administration was that Teague seemed to be favoring a more expensive bill along the lines of Yarborough's S.9. He had already expressed to the White House his desire to add a provision to the VA's bill to give readjustment benefits to all veterans irrespective of when and where they served.[38] At the end of 1965, Teague visited Vietnam and declared that the peacetime G.I. Bill was one of the most important issues raised by the soldiers. Upon his return he promised that his committee would pass a new G.I. Bill "out of committee in January or February." He also claimed to be under "heavy pressure" from the BOB and DOD to pass a scaled-down benefits package. He publicly countered the DOD's suggestion that a new bill might dissuade career military personnel by claiming "The bill ought to entice more men into

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[37] Recorded Telephone Conversation to the White House with Charles Schultze, 12/31/65, Folder "Final Passage," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

[38] Memo to Douglass Cater from William Driver, December 21, 1965, Folder "Final Passage," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

military ranks."[39] In December, the administration showed a draft of their bill to Teague before introducing it to his committee under the designation H.R.11985. Douglass Cater informed Lyndon Johnson that Teague's response to the bill was one of "grave reservations, and [he] seems to be leaning towards the Korean-type version."[40]

Teague's main bill, H.R.12410 reflected his preference for benefits that covered all veterans, but he shared the administration's concerns over the cost of Yarborough's bill. His bill would cost approximately 327 million dollars in its first year compared with 360 million for S.9. Johnson's "hotspots" bill would have cost only 150 million dollars for the first year.[41] The main savings in Teague's bill over S.9 came from reducing the monthly allowance from 110 dollars to 100 dollars a month, and providing benefits at a rate of only one month for every month served. S.9 offered benefits for 1.5 months for every month served. The BOB pushed Johnson to continue pressuring Teague into passing out an even less costly bill. On January 29, Schultze asked the President to "Call representative Teague and indicate that while we continue to support Cold War G.I. benefits, the bill now being considered by the Committee is unacceptable."[42] But on February 1, after two hours of closed-door deliberations, Teague's Veterans' Affairs

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[39] Quoted in the *Washington Daily News*, December 7, 1965, reprinted in Folder "LE/VA 10/15/65-3/2/66," Box 162, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislation Ex. LE/VA 2, 11/22/63, LBJ Library.

[40] Memo to Lyndon Johnson from Douglass Cater, December 28, 1965, Folder "Final Passage," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

[41] Memo to Lyndon Johnson from Charles L. Schultze, February 10, 1966, Folder "VA Educational Program I," Box 11, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Veteran Affairs, General VA3, LBJ Library.

[42] Memo to Lyndon Johnson from Charles L. Schultze, January 29, 1966, Folder "Final Passage," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

Committee unanimously approved his H.R.12410. Thereafter, the passage of the bill moved swiftly.

Despite the differences in cost between S.9 and H.R.12410, the Cold War G.I. Bill avoided going into conference. To appease Yarborough, Teague agreed to keep the senator's title S.9 on the bill if he agreed to the House's reductions in costs. Yarborough consented, and a final compromise version of the Veterans' Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966 went back to a vote in both houses. Teague opened proceedings in the House. He claimed that the bill had the support of the administration, the Department of Defense and all of the main veterans' groups. He proclaimed it "a bill that every Member can vote for and be happy with."[43]

In an admission that would soon come to have significant bearing on the lives of veterans, Teague emphasized "that it is not the intention of this legislation to establish a program which completely subsidizes the cost of a veteran's education or training program, as well as his living costs. . . . It is expected that in many cases the veteran will be required to make a contribution to the cost of his own education."[44] With this statement, Teague dramatically altered the impact the future G.I. Bills could have on the lives of veterans. Even though the 1944 G.I. Bill never explicitly promised to pay for all of a veteran's education costs, in reality, it did. The generosity of the original bill combined with the relatively low tuition costs at the time gave veterans the option of attending almost any school of their choosing without having to contribute any of their own money. Teague now advocated low benefits because he expected Vietnam era

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[43] *Congressional Record–House*, February 7, 1965, 2331.
[44] Ibid.

veterans to come up with some of their own money to fund their education. By the late 1960s, veterans that returned home expecting the same total coverage their predecessors enjoyed now found that the government had no intention of picking up all of their tab. Teague's unwillingness to guarantee a comparable benefits package to that enjoyed by World War II veterans would place a considerable burden on Vietnam era veterans wanting to return to school. Even though the World War II bill did not promise full coverage, it did give a *de facto* full coverage. Vietnam veterans had no such guarantee. Veterans' benefits tended to build upon and expanded those offered veterans of previous wars. But Teague's insistence that Vietnam era veterans share the burden of their college expenses upset this progression and set the stage for some passionate fights over education benefits in the coming years.

Despite the latent flaw in Teague proposal, many representatives followed him on the floor of the House offering praise for his bill. William Jennings Bryan Dorn (D-SC) stated, "This bill in necessary. It is fair and it is timely. The American people are ready for this legislation."[45] Paul Fino (R-NY) called the bill "a tribute to our veterans, not a grudging concession to national opinion."[46] But the praise was far from universal.

A succession of House members rose to express their reservations over the low monthly allowance. Robert Dole (R-KS) called the bill "not completely satisfactory."[47] Richard Roudebush (D-IN) described the payments as "inadequate."[48] Many attacked Johnson for pressuring the House into passing a less expensive measure. John Saylor (R-

[45] Ibid., 2337.
[46] Ibid., 2335.
[47] Ibid., 2339.
[48] Ibid., 2335.

PA) called the bill "a disgrace" and fumed, "we are afraid to give these men who are out defending our lives and our country any more than $100 a month under the threat of a Presidential veto."[49] Moreover, after further pressure from White House aides, the bill went to floor under a procedure that immunized it from amendment. This move—one which Teague would use repeatedly in the coming years—meant that the representatives that considered the bill too sparing could not offer any alternatives. Frank Horton (R-NY), who had submitted an earlier bill offering higher benefits, lamented that he could not introduce an amendment to increase the monthly allowance. Philip Burton (D-CA) spoke for many when he said, "Although I will support it, my one objection to the bill is that it does not go far enough. However, half a loaf is better than none."[50] Despite the reservations of many, the House passed the bill by a vote of 388-0. The *New York Times* carried the news on its front page under the headline "President Loses." But Johnson's defeat was not comprehensive. His pressure on Teague and ability to get the bill passed the House with no amendments had resulted in a final bill that few considered generous.

Before the bill went forward to the White House, the Senate had to approve Teague's changes in a vote that took place on February 10. Yarborough expressed his disappointment at the "insufficient" benefits, but conceded that the reductions "are not yet seriously crippling to the goal of providing a full program of educational and other readjustment benefits."[51] But there was little objection raised to the House changes, Peter Dominick (R-CO) even called them a "welcomed improvement" and praised Teague's

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[49] Ibid., 2336.
[50] Ibid., 2348.
[51] *Congressional Record–Senate*, February 10, 1966, 2875.

"fiscal prudence."[52] The amended bill passed the Senate by a vote of 99-0. Mike Mansfield (D-MT) concluded the Senate's debate by praising Yarborough's efforts in securing its passage. "This action today," he stated, "represents a high mark in many long and arduous battles for veterans by the senior senator from Texas. Veterans are indeed fortunate in having an advocate of his great skill and tireless devotion."[53]

Following the passage of the bill in Congress, the administration moved quickly to distance itself from its earlier opposition. Johnson had hoped for a reduced benefits package but he appeared to have little enthusiasm to carry the fight any further with a veto. White House staff members informed Johnson, "despite its obvious disadvantages, you will want to associate yourself fully with the benefits that will flow from this bill."[54] The signing ceremony was delayed until Teague and Driver returned from overseas, but on March 3, 1966 Johnson signed the Cold War G.I. Bill into law in a public ceremony in the East Room of the White House. Yarborough and Teague were joined by the likes of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, and General William Westmoreland at the ceremony. In his official remarks, Johnson stated, "Because it is for education, I am going to sign this bill, even though it provides hundreds of million of dollars more than I thought it advisable to recommend or to ask for this year."[55] Later on in the day he quipped, "I just had my

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[52] Ibid., 2873.

[53] Ibid., 2876.

[54] Memo to Lyndon Johnson from Will Sparks and Bob Hardesty, February 16, 1966, Folder "Final Passage," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background, New G.I. Bill, LBJ Library.

[55] *Public Papers, Johnson*, "Remarks Upon Signing the 'Cold War G.I. Bill,'" March 3, 1966.

budget busted wide open this morning by my colleagues from Texas, but it was on behalf of soldiers who needed education. It couldn't be busted for a better purpose."[56]

Yarborough's crusade had reached a moderately successful conclusion. The 1966 Cold War G.I. Bill, Public Law 89-358, did ensure that nearly four million veterans who had had their lives interrupted by military service since the end of the Korea Conflict could claim benefits to help them further their education or career objectives. Moreover, for the first time in the nation's history a veteran who had never served in a time of war or suffered perceptible injury from military service could expect generous rewards from the government. In a stroke, the bill overrode the objections of generations of presidents and politicians concerned with the economic effects on the nation and the moral implications for the nation's soldiers. The likes of Harding, Coolidge, FDR, and Eisenhower had feared for the consequences of providing a permanent system of benefits for all veterans. As the Bradley Commission had made clear, military service had always been an obligation of citizenship. Opponents of the 1966 G.I. Bill had continued to argue that military service was something for which every citizen should be held accountable and should be a matter of civic pride. But the new benefits meant that military service could now be a viable means for economic or social advancement and not a natural obligation of living in a democracy. The fear of a more mercenary attitude among servicemen and women died hard. In 1968, the *New York Times*, called the concept of peacetime benefits "retrograde in its philosophy" and warned of the "creation of a permanent privileged class of veterans, a postwar mercenary class uncongenial to the

[56] Quoted in the *New York Times*, March 4, 1966, 1,4.

national heritage . . . [that would] aggrandize and solidify the specialized status of the veteran and the concept of veteran versus citizen."[57]

Yarborough had successfully countered such arguments by placing the benefits in the context of the nation's perpetual Cold War preparedness and the increasing numbers of dangerous situations America's soldiers found themselves in. Moreover, events in Vietnam had persuaded many of the need for a new G.I. Bill. When Yarborough had fought for a Cold War G.I. Bill in 1959 and 1961, not enough people were convinced by his arguments. But 1965 had been a critical year in the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. Operation Rolling Thunder, the sustained bombing of North Vietnam, had begun in February. In July, Johnson had raised the draft call and committed a further 50,000 troops to South Vietnam. In October and November, the U.S. had already engaged in one of its most vicious battles of the war in the Ia Drang Valley. By year's end, the U.S. had 184,000 troops in South Vietnam. Close to 1,500 had already died with a further 5,000 wounded.[58] The need for a new G.I. Bill had become evident to all. Despite his devotion to more universal education benefits, even Lyndon Johnson had accepted the need for new benefits. Although his administration had wanted a more restricted bill, he had accepted the nation's obligation to those veterans under fire.

Not everyone was happy with the amounts offered by the new bill. Many congressmen had raised concerns that the benefits were lower than those offered under the previous two G.I. Bills passed in 1944 and 1952. The government did, at least, recognize the limitations of the 1966 bill. Soon after the passage of the bill, both

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[57] *New York Times*, April 23, 1968, 46.

[58] Figures and timeline from George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal, 2nd Edition* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 427-428.

Congress and the administration worked to make benefits more just for the Vietnam veteran. In September 1966, Johnson created a Special Task Force by executive order to examine veteran benefits. William Driver chaired the Task Force that also included representatives from the DOD, BOB, and the Department of Health and Welfare. Their report, submitted on November 19, included a proposal to increase the monthly allowance to 130 dollars for the single veteran, up from 100 dollars with comparable increases for veterans claiming dependants. The Task Force also recommended that veterans should be allowed to finish their high school degrees without having to cut into the number of months for which they could claim benefits for higher education. Johnson took the recommendations to heart and sent a special message to Congress on January 31, 1967 on "America's Servicemen and Veterans." The main purpose of his proposals was to "remove the inequalities in the treatment of our Vietnam veterans" and, in keeping with the ideals of the Great Society, "to enlarge the opportunities for educationally disadvantaged veterans."[59] Johnson praised the nation's servicemen and women for "again fighting and giving their lives in the defense of freedom," and added, "It is essential that we convey to them . . . our full recognition and gratitude for their service in Vietnam and in other troubled areas of the world."[60] He put these principles into practice by proposing the Vietnam Conflict Servicemen and Veterans Act of 1967. The act incorporated most of the recommendations of the Task Force, including the thirty-dollar

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[59] White House Press Release, "Remarks of the President on Submitting Veterans Message," January 31, 1967, Folder "Message to Congress," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background: Vietnam Vets Benefits, 1967, LBJ Library.

[60] White House Press Release "America's Servicemen and Veterans," January 31, 1967, Folder "Message to Congress," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background: Vietnam Vets Benefits, 1967, LBJ Library.

increase in veterans' education benefits and the provisions to help disadvantaged veterans finish their high school education without affecting their college benefits. In addition, he called for disability compensation at full wartime rates for those who served after August 5, 1964 and more liberalized pensions, medical benefits, and life insurance for veterans and their dependants. Johnson had decided the time was right to reward the defenders of freedom. "With these benefits," he hoped, "we can assure them that we do not intend to let them down in their hour of need."[61] Even in his opposition to the 1966 bill, he had never repudiated the veteran cause. He had always supported benefits for those serving in hazardous areas such as Vietnam and hoped that legislation such as the Higher Education Act could help all other veterans. But with his proposals of January 1967, he had accepted more fully the need for more generous benefits.

While Johnson rediscovered the veteran cause, Yarborough had not been idle. In fact, he had preempted Johnson's proposals by introducing his own bill to increase benefits on January 11, another S.9. He proposed similar increase in monthly allowances, but his bill was much more costly because it offered farm training, on the job training, and flight training benefits. The previous G.I. Bills had offered these, but the VA considered them unnecessary because requests for farm and job training had declined precipitously between the 1944 and 1952 bills. Moreover, the VA decried that veterans had undertaken much of their flight training for recreational rather than vocational purposes.[62] A.W. Stratton, Chief Benefits Director of the VA described the White House

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Statement of A.W. Stratton, VA Chief Benefits Director before the Subcommittee on Veterans' Affairs Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, March 20,

bill as "the sounder approach" and pushed for its enactment instead of S.9.[63] On the same day Yarborough introduced his bill, Joseph Montoya also introduced S.16 to provide full wartime benefits to Vietnam veterans. These benefits would include full wartime disability compensation rates (roughly 20 percent higher than for peacetime veterans), increased medical benefits, and a 250-dollar burial allowance. For the next eight months the House and Senate undertook lengthy negotiations to find a compromise between Johnson's proposals, S.9, and S.16.

The main arguments over the three bills in committee revolved around the costs of the various training proposals, but all agreed that the basic educational allowance should be raised. An amalgam of the three, under the title S.16, passed the House on August 17 with a 404-0 vote and the Senate on August 23 by a vote of 88-0. The new bill provided single veterans a monthly stipend of 130 dollars per month with proportional increases for dependants. Johnson's provision of allowing for a high school education remained, as did Yarborough's calls for training, albeit with some stricter eligibility requirements. Pilots, for example, had to have a private license before receiving benefits for a commercial license to eliminate the possibility that benefits would be used for recreational purposes. Farmers had to be already enrolled in an agricultural course or employed in agricultural position that would benefit from additional training.

On August 31, Johnson held another public signing ceremony in the East Room of the White House, and S.16 became Public Law 90-77. He claimed that the new bill

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1967, Folder "LE/VA 3/5/66-9/7/67," Box 161, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislation Ex. LE/VA 2 11/22/63, LBJ Library.

[63] Ibid.

"gives those now in service the same veterans' benefits that have been granted to their brothers in other wars."[64] The bill received a generally enthusiastic reception around the country. The *Asheville Citizen* commented, "This bill gives GI's especially those of the Vietnam era, a break they should have." The *Wichita Falls Times* observed, "When a young American, fresh out of high school and on the threshold of adulthood, must spend a year or two fighting for his country, he deserves more tangible rewards than praise and medals. He gets them under the terms of the new 'GI Bill' signed into law by President Johnson." The *Salt Lake Tribune* added, "In signing the new Veterans Bill of Rights President Johnson elevated the war in Vietnam to the status of both World Wars and the Korean War as far as veterans benefits are concerned."[65]

Despite such accolades, Johnson continued to study the veteran question during his final months as president. He established further commissions to study veterans' benefits, one in 1967 and another in 1968 headed by Robert McNamara. He also examined such proposals as "VIPS" (Veterans in Public Service), which sought to place veterans in public service roles such as teachers or firefighters, and "GIVER" (G.I. Volunteer for Education and Redevelopment), which promoted the idea of training veterans to teach in deprived areas.[66] He signed his last significant veterans' education legislation on October 23, 1968, several months after he had decided against running for a second term. The bill brought Vietnam veterans benefits even more closely in line with

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[64] Press Release, "Remarks of the President Upon Signing the Cold War G.I. Bill of Rights (S.16)" August 31, 1967, Folder "The Bill Signing," Box 1, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislative Background: Vietnam Vets Benefits, 1967, LBJ Library.

[65] Collected newspaper reports from April 24, 1967 to August 30, 1967, Folder "Califano/Veterans Programs," Box 1, Joseph Califano Papers, LBJ Library.

[66] "GIVER" description, Folder "LE/VA 3/5/66-9/7/67," Box 161, Lyndon B. Johnson Papers, 1963-1969, Legislation Ex. LE/VA 2 11/22/63, LBJ Library.

those offered their predecessors by offering them one and a half months of benefits for every month served up to thirty-six months after they had served for eighteen months. The 1966 and 1967 bills offered only one month of benefits per one month of service. The 1968 bill also extended education opportunities to widows of veterans for the first time. Previously, only the minor dependants of veterans killed or fully disabled could claim benefits. At the signing ceremony he offered his thanks to Yarborough, Teague, and Driver for their work over the previous five years before signing Public Law 90-631 into law.[67]

Johnson views on veterans' benefits had come a long way since taking office. From his initial opposition to a Cold War G.I. Bill, he had finally backed up all his praise for the defenders of freedom by enacting significant and wide ranging benefits packages that would affect the lives of millions and forever change the nature of military service. On paper, the benefits offered to Vietnam veterans after the 1967 increases seemed to provide a decent opportunity for most to enter higher education. For veterans who had served in peacetime conditions, the new benefits seemed like a reasonable reward for service. But there was a flaw in the benefits that soon became apparent.

The relatively low amount of benefits offered in the 1966 bill reflected the fact that the legislation also rewarded peacetime veterans who did not expect any real readjustment problems. For those servicemen and women stationed in South Vietnam, military service took place in anything but peacetime conditions. Studies of the combat experience of Vietnam veterans over the last few decades have revealed the grueling and

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[67] *Public Papers, Johnson*, "Remarks Upon Signing Bill Extending Veterans Education Benefits," October 23, 1968.

hazardous nature of wartime conditions in Vietnam that made service at least as damaging as it had been to veterans of either World War II or Korea. The Vietnam veterans returned home with readjustment problems every bit as great, if not greater, than veterans of World War II or Korea. Only in the years after Johnson left office did the majority of Vietnam veterans return home. Only when these veterans began to return *en masse* could any judgement be made on the effectiveness of the benefits as a readjustment tool. The generosity of the previous G.I. bills allowed veterans to get their lives back on track. Because debates over the 1966 bill became enmeshed in the wider issues over peacetime veterans, democratic obligation, and universal education programs, the education benefits first available to Vietnam era veterans did not provide the same kind of crutch. Although the 1967 and 1968 amendments aimed to make benefits more equitable, by 1968 Vietnam era veterans received only twenty dollars more than Korea Conflict veterans, despite the rising costs of tuition. Even though Yarborough had the best of intentions when he fought for a Cold War G.I. Bill, the fact that Vietnam combat veterans would receive the same benefits as peacetime veterans despite their far greater sacrifice made the G.I. Bill a less effective readjustment tool than it had been for combat veterans of Word War II or Korea. Those warriors who came home from Vietnam expecting same kind of full ride to school soon discovered that the 1966 Veterans' Readjustment Act proved to be the wrong bill in the wrong place at the wrong time. Had the bill covered just Vietnam veterans, the benefits might have been more generous. But because the 1966 bill offered benefits to all veterans, irrespective of where they served, Vietnam veterans did not receive adequate compensation for their additional sacrifice. As the veterans started coming home in large numbers this problem became evident.

Chapter 3

A PEACETIME BILL FOR THE WARRIOR: SHORT CHANGING THE VIETNAM VETERAN

> One of the virtues of the World War II GI Bill was that it provided scholarship money for young men from working-class and lower middle-class backgrounds who would otherwise have had little opportunity for further education. On the surface, the GI Bill enacted in 1966 seemed to do the same thing, but in reality, the level of benefits was so low that participation was greatly restricted for veterans of lower class families who lacked additional resources to draw upon for support.
>
> *Nader Report*

> For millions of Vietnam vets, the present GI Bill benefits just aren't as good as those our fathers got thirty years ago.
>
> Forrest Lindey, Vietnam veteran.

> We recognize the GI Bill was not designed—and given the diversity of tuition charges among schools, could not be equitably designed—to cover all of a veteran's educational costs.
>
> Olney B. Owen, Veterans Administration

In 1969, three years after the passage of the first Vietnam era G.I. Bill, Dennis Rainwater wrote an impassioned letter to Richard Nixon expressing his dismay over the low level of education benefits offered under the bill. Rainwater refused his captaincy after serving a tour of duty as a first lieutenant in Vietnam in order to return to Oklahoma and complete his education. Because of the low benefits, Rainwater had to work a forty-hour week in order to support his wife and baby in addition to taking sixteen hours of classes. Rainwater asked the President, "at a time when you are trying to get support for your Vietnam policy, how can you expect such treatment of Veterans to go unnoticed?"[1]

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[1] Letter to Richard Nixon from Dennis Rainwater, November 13, 1969, Folder 72, Box 124, Carl Albert Legislative Papers, Carl Albert Congressional Research Center, Norman, Oklahoma.

After a protracted legislative battle, Vietnam veterans finally had their own G.I. Bill in 1966. But in the early years of the program, veterans such as Dennis Rainwater soon found that the new bill did not provide them with the same opportunities that veterans of either World War II or Korea enjoyed. The first rumblings of discontent over the level of education benefits surfaced under the Johnson administration. But as millions more veterans returned to civilian life during the Nixon administration, the crescendo of criticism rose proportionally. Significantly, it was also during the Nixon administration that a new cultural figure came to the fore of the American conscience, that of the troubled, scorned, and neglected Vietnam veteran. Newspapers and magazines began to carry stories of veterans returning with drug or psychological problems, unable to find work, and whose financial and physical readjustment needs the federal government ignored. Against this backdrop, debates over veteran education funding took on a particularly vitriolic tone. For the next several years the issue of funding levels became a touchstone for judging how well the government treated returning veterans. And although the Nixon administration enacted several new measures to aid returning veterans, it was never enough to quell the rising tide of criticism emanating from the press and within the veteran community.

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, press reports left the overwhelming impression that Vietnam veterans suffered a difficult readjustment. The *New York Times*, probably the most influential media source of the time, contained numerous stories of veteran hardship. Front-page headlines such as "The Vietnam Veteran: Silent, Perplexed, Unnoticed," and "Postwar Shock Besets Ex-G.I.'s" gave an overall impression of veteran

difficulties.[2] Specific stories on unemployment rates, psychological problems, violent crimes, and drug abuse added the salacious details.[3] Other print media followed suit. The *Wall Street Journal* noted that unlike the World War II veteran's return, "the boys are not cheering, nor the men shouting, nor the ladies turning out."[4] The *Washington Post* described Vietnam veterans as "Aliens in Their Land."[5] *Newsweek* highlighted veterans' problems in a 1971 article titled, "The Vietnam Vet: 'No One Gives a Damn.'"[6] In 1974, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs printed a collection of *Source Material on the Vietnam Veteran.* Chairman Vance Hartke stated that the compilation "is intended to present a representative spectrum of views concerning these veterans which have appeared in print since the Vietnam Conflict began."[7] Tellingly, not one press article contained in the 900-page collection presented a positive view of the veterans' readjustment.

The overwhelming majority of newspaper, magazine, and periodical articles emphasized veterans' problems. But the majority of press reports were anecdotal. Few studies existed that quantified exactly how Vietnam veterans fared in their readjustment. By concentrating almost exclusively on the negative homecoming experiences, the press helped create an image of the troubled Vietnam veteran that became an iconic figure in

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[2] *New York Times*, November 8, 1970, 1, and August 21, 1972, 1.

[3] See, for example "Court Hears Story of a Soldiers Life With Drugs," on September 9, 1971, 32, "Job Outlook Is Bleak for Vietnam Veterans" on June 5, 1971, 1, and "Psychiatrist Says 'Brutalizing' Vietnam War Causes Problems for Ex-G.I.'s" on November 26, 1970, 12, all from the *New York Times*.

[4] *Wall Street Journal*, February 24, 1970, reprinted in *Source Material on the Vietnam Veteran* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), 22.

[5] *Washington Post*, January 27, 1971, reprinted in ibid., 37.

[6] *Newsweek*, March 29, 1971, reprinted in ibid., 37

[7] *Source Material on the Vietnam Veteran* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), III.

American society. Television and film portrayals of disturbed veterans ensured that the image endured for decades. Not every veteran came home to such difficulties. Those suffering from drug problems or unable to find a job remained a small minority. But the circumstantial evidence did suggest that at least some veterans were suffering readjustment problems. Inevitably, those that did suffer problems looked to the government for relief.

Most veterans entered the armed forces fully aware of the generous benefits the government offered veterans after World War II. Many hoped for a similar bounty following their release from military service. But the Vietnam era veteran found government assistance lacking in many respects. The unemployment insurance that created the "52-20" club after World War II was no longer there. Veterans could claim only the less generous unemployment benefits available to all citizens. Thus, they did not have the same opportunity to cool down, reflect, and plan out their immediate future without worrying about how to make ends meet. Obtaining a higher-education degree under the G.I. Bill offered one potential avenue to overcome many of the perceived economic and social problems of returning veterans. With the new G.I. Bill in place, many veterans looked forward to following in the footsteps of their World War II predecessors. But when it came time for the Vietnam era veterans to call in the debt owed them by the nation, their government proved far more miserly.

The relatively low amount of money offered in education benefits lay at the root of most veteran complaints. Veterans of one Texas Community College wrote House Speaker Carl Albert in March of 1972 to complain, "We need either increased wages or increased benefits for the services we rendered to our country. In these times of

economic adjustment, we have discovered that gainful employment is extremely difficult, if not impossible to obtain."[8] Another veteran wrote Albert, "I am a Vietnam veteran . . . with combat experience. I had to endure a great deal of suffering and all I wish now is to have a fair reimbursement from the government for my education."[9] Others complained to the Speaker of their "considerable difficulty meeting the cost of going to college," or that "the G.I. Bill has been a great help and has enabled us to attend college at night, [but] it is still not enough to live on with the high cost of living."[10] Joseph Mulholland, Associate Dean at Fordham University wrote the *New York Times* to argue, "The disproportionate majority of the deprived and disadvantaged, both black and white, who have fought in Indochina receive stingy handouts; they deserve . . . generous benefits."[11]

Tales of veteran hardships mounted in the press. The *Washington Post* carried news of a "Veterans Rights March" in the D.C. area where veterans carried banners with slogans such as "We Demand Decent Living Income for GIs, Vets, and Their Families" [12] A *New York Times* article contained the testimony from one air force veteran who stated, "You want to know what I think of the benefits? I think they stink, man. For the kind of church change they pay you in the service they ought to give you enough for an education

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[8] Letter to Carl Albert from the Veterans Club, Tarrant County Junior College, Fort Worth, Texas, Undated (Albert's reply is dated March 1, 1972), Folder 6, Box 142, Carl Albert Legislative Files, Carl Albert Center.

[9] Letter to Carl Albert from Michael W. Dubrick, April 28, 1972, Folder 6, Box 142, Carl Albert Legislative Files, Carl Albert Center.

[10] Quoted from numerous letters to Carl Albert, Folder 6, Box 142, Carl Albert Legislative Files, Carl Albert Center.

[11] Letter to the editor, *New York Times*, June 1, 1972, 42.

[12] "Vietnam Veterans Protest Benefit Cut With Parade, Rally," *Washington Post*, May 20, 1973, B4.

when you get out."[13] Tim O Brien, in a 1973 edition of *Penthouse*, related the stories of veterans who struggled to make ends meet throughout the Nixon's tenure. One veteran had to borrow money and take a job in a textile factory that paid only two dollars an hour when he tried to use his G.I. Bill in 1969. The veteran recalled, "We ran up plenty of bills, just barely hanging in there . . . me working like a bull all the while trying to study, sweating in the factory, dashing to class."[14] Many veterans soon made the painful discovery that they could not rely solely on their benefits and had to supplement their income through loans or additional work.

One of the main failings of the first Vietnam era G.I. Bill resulted from changes in the distribution of benefits enacted since the original bill of 1944. During the 1950 inquiry into G.I. Bill fraud, Olin Teague's committee found that institutions often raised their tuition costs arbitrarily to defraud the government. This led Teague to become an outspoken advocate of paying tuition benefits directly to the veterans and not to the schools. His view prevailed in the 1952 Korea Conflict G.I. Bill and the 1966 G.I. Bill. While paying veterans directly succeeded in reducing greatly incidents of fraud, it also placed considerable restrictions on how and where veterans could pursue their education. Because Korea and Vietnam era veterans received a fixed monthly stipend from which to pay for tuition, fees, and books, many found that attending higher cost institutions, particularly private schools, left them with insufficient funds to live on. The World War II veteran never had these problems. The original G.I. Bill paid enough in tuition to

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[13] "Most Veterans of Vietnam Fail to Seek Aid Under the G.I. Bill," *New York Times*, April 9, 1972, 46.

[14] Tim O'Brien, "The Vietnam Veteran," *Penthouse Magazine*, November 1974, 77.

allow veterans to attend almost any school they wanted. When Vietnam veterans, the media, and some members of Congress began the inevitable comparisons with the World War II G.I. Bill, they found the 1966 version lacking.

Rising tuition costs compounded the veterans' financial difficulties. Although benefits kept rough parity with cost of living increases, veterans complained that tuition in many schools had as much as quadrupled since World War II. The University of Illinois and Parkland College Veterans Association pointed out to lawmakers that tuition at the University of Illinois had risen 307 percent since from 1947 to 1970, fees 430 percent, books by 433 percent, and room and board 183 percent and called on Congress "to bring benefits up to a level comparable to successful programs of the past."[15] Frank V. Otto, director of New York State Division of Veterans affairs used his G.I. Bill after World War II. It paid his full tuition at Columbia State and gave him sufficient money to live off every month. Surveying the plight of the Vietnam-era veterans his agency administered, Otto told the *New York Times*, "There's no way a vet can go to college on the G.I. Bill today, unless he's got some money of his own."[16] Similarly, John Reavis, assistant dean of the University of New York pointed out, "In 1945, the returning veteran could sustain himself and his family on the G.I. Bill. Today, the cost is astronomical."[17]

An additional unforeseen problem arose from the decision to make direct tuition payments to veterans. Differing tuition costs in different states meant that the monthly

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[15] Illinois Federation of Veterans in College: Policy Statement, Folder 6, Box 142, Carl Albert Legislative Files, Carl Albert Center.

[16] "Most Veterans of Vietnam Fail To Seek Aid Under the G.I. Bill," *New York Times*, April 9, 1972, 46.

[17] "Vietnam Veterans in Area Failing to Utilize G.I. Bill," *New York Times*, November 4, 1973, 1.

stipend went further in some states than in others. The monthly stipend was the same across all states. Therefore, in states with a well-developed low-cost public school system such as California and Arizona, Vietnam veterans used their benefits in greater numbers compared with their contemporaries in states with high tuition rates such as Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey. Because the money went further, college represented a more affordable option for some than others depending on where one lived. By one *New York Times* estimate, California veterans received 890 million dollars in federal benefits through 1972 compared with only 315 million in New York. Having a potentially less educated veteran population caused concern for some Northeastern politicians. Westchester Representative Ogden Reid noted, "Whenever educational opportunities are less than those of other states, this puts you at an economic disadvantage." New Jersey Democrat Henry Helstoski chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Education and Training added, "High tuition costs and high living costs are worst in the metropolitan area. . . . You're absolutely clobbered in a 50-mile radius around New York City."[18] By 1973, 37 percent of New York Vietnam veterans had used their benefits compared with 51 percent of California's veterans.[19] Although different regions may have different attitudes toward education, the differences here seem to be a consequence of the differing costs of tuition. As Helstoski commented, these differences "do not reflect a difference in desire—the desire goes across the board."[20]

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[18] Ibid., 17.
[19] Ibid., 1.
[20] Ibid., November 4, 1973.

The sense of public outrage over inadequate benefits intensified throughout Nixon's time in office. Incredulous newspaper editorials helped push the issue of education benefits to the center of the wider discourse on society's neglect of the Vietnam veteran. On July 4, 1969, the *New York Times* called for an increase in education aid to veterans, describing the benefits as "clearly inadequate in terms of today's college costs."[21] In a later editorial, the paper commented,

> Unlike the men who fought on World War II, the veterans of Vietnam have served in a war over which the country has been sharply divided. The Vietnam war, moreover, called for sacrifices only of those who were in the armed forces, while their compatriots at home have remained largely unaffected.
>
> The veterans of Vietnam ought therefore to receive financial benefits at least comparable to those afforded the veterans of World War II. Yet the educational G.I. Bill of Rights today constituted a niggardly handout, compared to the full funding of college studies which made the post-World War II G.I. Bill so significant a landmark in the expansion of educational opportunities.[22]

Peter Braestrup of the *Washington Post* attacked the government for "Abandoning Our Vietnam Veterans" by failing to enact legislation to increase benefits.[23] The *Boston Globe* cited the Vietnam veteran's "cut-rate educations," and opined, "because the war is unpopular, because the Vietnam veterans do not include the sons of the rich, the powerful and the articulate, because the veterans of this war have been unwilling or unable to organize on their own behalf, nobody cares."[24] The *Oklahoma Journal* added, "it is shameful, and our chickens are sure to come home to roost in future times when we may need the services of young Americans to keep our country safe."[25]

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[21] *New York Times*, July 4, 1969, 39.
[22] *New York Times*, April 13, 1972, 42.
[23] *Washington Post*, June 6, 1973, 21
[24] Quoted in the *Oklahoma Journal*, December 18, 1973, 12.
[25] Ibid.

The anecdotal evidence suggested clearly that Vietnam veterans experienced problems with their G.I. Bill. But there was little quantifiable data to back up this assumption. Several studies appeared during the early 1970s in an attempt to ascertain the extent of the problems faced by veterans under the G.I. Bill. One of the few organizations looking out for the interests of the Vietnam veteran, The National Association of Concerned Veterans (NACV), conducted one such study.

Though never as powerful or influential as the older veterans lobbies, the NACV emerged during these troubled years as one of the most important and most consistent advocates of Vietnam veterans' rights. Formed in Mankato, Minnesota in 1968 by a group of G.I. Bill users as the National Association of Collegiate veterans, the NACV was one of the only Vietnam veteran organizations with a national focus.[26] Many Vietnam veterans seemed reluctant to organize in the aftermath of their service. As one staff member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee noted, "Today's vets, for better or worse, are not a highly organized group, unlike the World War II men. . . . They come home, and don't think of themselves as veterans and don't organize themselves."[27] When pushing for benefit increases in the summer of 1974, the NACV complained that, "Currently not enough grass roots support has hit reluctant Congressmen to press them into influencing fellow Congressmen who are blocking Senate proposed improvements in the G.I. Bill."[28] Daniel Ellsberg alluded to the differing mindset of the Vietnam veteran

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[26] The organization changed its name from "Collegiate" to "Concerned" in 1973. Originally, the NACV represented only college veterans clubs and associations, but the change in name reflected a change in focus to include all Vietnam veterans.

[27] Quoted in, "Most Veterans of Vietnam Fail To Seek Aid Under the G.I. Bill," *New York Times*, April 9, 1972, 46.

[28] *NACV Newsletter*, July-August 1974, 1.

in a speech at Columbia University in October 1971. According to Ellsberg the Vietnam veteran represented a new kind of veteran, one less concerned with organizing for benefits and more concerned with "resistance to legitimate authority" and bringing an end to the war.[29] This lack of organization resulted in a lack of lobbying power in Capitol Hill. The more established veterans' organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and the Disabled American Veterans consistently advocated increased benefits for Vietnam veterans, but because these organizations represented veterans of all former wars, they did not direct their full attention the Vietnam veteran's problems.

The NACV went some way toward filling this void. They organized effective lobbying campaigns for several veterans' initiatives including the establishment of Upward Bound Programs and brought lawsuits against the government to free up funds to support the federally mandated veterans programs. The NACV also promoted job fairs across the country to help veterans find employment and pushed for greater sensitivity in the VA to the plight of minority veterans. Representatives also testified before several House and Senate Committees on veteran' benefits. Whenever Congress debated veterans benefits the NACV sent members, "flying, driving and hitch hiking in to see their individual Congressmen."[30] Despite some recalcitrance among its own constituents, by 1973 the NACV claimed over 30,000 dues-paying members and established 130 chapters nationwide. Vance Hartke, Chairman of the Senate Committee for Veteran Affairs praised the organization on the floor of the Senate for its efforts, even though,

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[29] Quoted in the *New York Times*, October 26, 1971, 47.
[30] *NACV Newsletter*, July-August 1974, 1.

"too often some people would like to forget the Indochina war and would also like to forget those who fought that war." Hartke noted, "This has meant tough sledding for NACV."[31]

At their 6th annual convention on February 1, 1973, the NACV issued a Special Programs Committee Report on education funding. Based on a study undertaken by the Canisius College Veterans Club of Buffalo, New York, the study lent statistical support to veterans' criticisms of their benefits. Based on the average costs of education institutions calculated by the *Educational Statistical Digest,* the report compared the average financial situation of veterans attending schools during the school year 1945/46 and 1971/72. Taking into account rising tuition costs, living costs, and dollar inflation, the report revealed clearly that the 1971/72 benefits placed considerable restrictions on where a Vietnam era veteran without could pursue their education compared with the World War II veteran.

Initially, the report offered some hope for the Vietnam veteran. It found that if a veteran used their benefits to attend a public institution at the in-state tuition rate, then the Vietnam era veteran fared rather well. In fact, the 1971/72 benefits paid veterans 10.6 percent *more* than the 1945/46 benefits even taking the increase in costs into account. But if a veteran chose to attend a private institution, even at the in-state rate, the World War II veteran received 77 percent more than the Vietnam era veteran. According to the report, the average tuition costs of private education had risen from 769 dollars in 1945/46 to 1,957 dollars in 1971/72 after adjustment for inflation. This made private

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[31] Excerpt from the *Congressional Record* reprinted in the September 1973 *NACV Newsletter*, 1.

schools prohibitively expensive for most of the Vietnam era veterans unless they had some additional funds. Similarly, if a veteran had to go out of state to pursue his or her education, their G.I. Bill became precipitously less beneficial. A World War II veteran paying out of state tuition and expenses at a public institution received 36.7 percent more in benefits than the Vietnam era veteran. For an out of state student attending a private institution, the World War II G.I. Bill paid veterans 79.6 percent more than the Vietnam era veteran received. The report concluded,

> In 1945, the veteran, due to the provisions of the G.I. Bill, had freedom of choice as to which institution of higher education he wished to attend. The main factor allowing him this freedom of choice was the tuition allowance. As our study has revealed, the average tuition cost for all types of educational institutions, both public and private, fell below the $500.00 ceiling of annual tuition allowance. We believe that each Vietnam Era Veteran should be granted the same degree of choice today that his father had in 1945.

Other, higher profile studies came to many of the same conclusions as the NACV report. Ralph Nader, the ubiquitous consumer rights activist, commissioned an extensive investigation into the Vietnam veterans' experience. Begun in June 1971 and published in 1973 as *The Discarded Army: Veterans After Vietnam*, the *Nader Report* studied the federal response to the problems faced by Vietnam veterans with particular emphasis on the role of the Veterans Administration. The report highlighted the acute need for a strong G.I. Bill in light of the difficulties faces by many veterans in securing employment. It noted that of all the federal programs and benefits offered, "none has been more prized by returning soldiers than the education benefits under the G.I. Bill."[32]

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[32] Paul Starr, *Discarded Army: Veterans After Vietnam* (New York: Charterhouse, 1973), 226.

The report confirmed that "the major complaint of Vietnam veterans . . . has been that the current level of benefits has lagged behind those available after World War II."[33]

The report also confirmed one of the other main criticisms against the bill, namely that low payments placed considerable restrictions on the type and location of schools most could afford. Noting that 49 percent of veterans had used their benefits in California where they could make use of a highly-developed system of low-cost public schools compared with just 29 percent in Pennsylvania which had proportionally higher number of expensive private institutions, the report concluded that, "Veterans from states that lack extensive systems of public higher education have much less opportunity to use the G.I. Bill."[34] In addition, the report noted, "While World War II veterans were slightly more likely to attend private colleges than the general population, Korean and Vietnam era veterans have been more likely to attend public institutions."[35] The report conceded that this factor resulted in part from the failure of the later G.I. Bills to pay direct tuition, but also from the proliferation of public schools since the end of World War II.

One of the more scathing criticisms of Vietnam era education benefits appeared in both the NACV and Nader reports and gained growing attention from the media, namely that the low levels of payments adversely affected the lower classes and disadvantaged minorities. Because relying solely on G.I. Bill benefits left veterans with greatly conscribed educational opportunities, those that did not have recourse to alternative funds suffered disproportionately. The *Nader Report* concluded,

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[33] Ibid., 227.
[34] Ibid., 241.
[35] Ibid., 237.

> One of the virtues of the World War II GI Bill was that it provided scholarship money for young men from working-class and lower middle-class backgrounds who would otherwise have had little opportunity for further education. On the surface, the GI Bill enacted in 1966 seemed to do the same thing, but in reality, the level of benefits was so low that participation was greatly restricted for veterans of lower class families who lacked additional resources to draw upon for support.[36]

African-American veterans, in particular, faced additional problems to their white counterparts after leaving the service. At the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, unemployment remained endemic to young black males. According to one estimate, almost 30 percent of black male veterans between the ages of twenty and twenty-four were out of work compared to less than 6 percent of white veterans of the same age.[37] Stories increased in the press of black veterans struggling to make ends meet. In 1968, the *New York Times* reported on one former "tunnel rat" who, three months after discharge from the army could not find employment and "doesn't have much to show for his year under fire. He's living back home with his mother, brother and sister on a dreary, littered street in a battered four-story red brick tenement house."[38] Another such story detailed the post-service experience of African American veteran Sergeant Dwight H. Johnson, a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient who was shot and killed whilst committing an armed robbery at a grocery store.[39]

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[36] Ibid., 241-242.

[37] James Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 171.

[38] Sol Stern, "When the Black G.I. Comes Back From Vietnam," *New York Times*, March 24, 1968, SM27.

[39] "From Dakota to Detroit: The Death of a Troubled Hero," *New York Times*, May 26, 1971, 1.

A more generous G.I. Bill might have provided an avenue to economic advancement for black veterans, and no doubt it did help some attain an education or vocational training. But, as the NACV complained, "Since the enactment of the first G.I. Bill, the desires, needs, and problems of the minority veteran have seldom, if ever, been met to the extent of his counterpart."[40] Tim O'Brien noted that, "For Black Vietnam veterans, many of whom think they fought a racist war, the modern GI Bill is another piece of the white man's tokenism."[41] One black veteran with two children commented, "It's been rough. I do odd jobs and things. . . . Ever since I've been out, it's been a hard time for me."[42] Another, noting that his benefits failed to cover his living expenses stated, "It's really a problem. . . . All the food expenditures, gas and so forth are going up."[43] A veterans counselor at a New York Community College commented, "The average white, middle class vet, with a high school degree and some tolerance for bureaucracy can get what he wants out of the V.A. . . . For the middle-class vet who can get support from his parents or who has a wife who can support him, . . . the benefits are a boon, a nice supplement. But they won't finance an education."[44] In April 1971, New York veterans formed the United Black Veterans of America seeking greater benefits for minority veterans. One member commented,

> As blacks and minority-group members, we feel we aren't getting a fair share of opportunities even though we have given so much of ourselves in the service of America. . . . when we came out we discovered [America] did not seem to

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[40] Quoted in Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts,* 171.

[41] O'Brien, "Vietnam Veteran," 128.

[42] "Vietnam Veterans Protest Benefit Cut With Parade, Rally," *Washington Post*, May 20, 1973, B4.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Quoted in the *New York Times*, April 9, 1973, 43.

> recognize our role in fighting for her, as is evidenced by the lack of fair and equal opportunities for black veterans.[45]

James Westheider points out in one of the few studies to discuss the postwar experience of African-American veterans, *Fighting on Two Fronts* (1997), many black veterans benefited from public service organizations such as the Urban League's Veterans Affairs Program and from college veterans' clubs.[46] But such programs offered mere palliatives to the deeper-seated problem of government parsimony.

Some African Americans faced a further complication. The military had five types of discharge at the end of the Vietnam War. Over 90 percent of veterans received honorable discharges, making them eligible for a full slate of veterans' benefits. A dishonorable discharge precluded a veteran from receiving any benefits. Other classifications required a review by the Veteran Administration to determine eligibility. As is well documented, by the end of the Vietnam War, morale declined as the military effort wore down. Incidents of indiscipline increased as no soldier wanted to be the last one killed in a crusade that had long since expired. For African Americans, the problem seemed particularly acute. Racial tension, though not pervasive, became an increasing feature of the military life in Vietnam. Mirroring the fractured nature of late-1960s American society, a combination of lingering white racism and growing militancy among African Americans contributed to much of the racial violence in Vietnam. A race riot broke out at the Long Binh stockade in 1968. At Cam Rahn Bay, outrage spread among black servicemen when white soldiers raised a Confederate flag to mark the assassination

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[45] Quoted in the *New York Times*, August 29, 1971, 7.
[46] Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 171.

of Dr. Martin Luther King.[47] As one veteran recalled, "There was a whole change of attitude. Even among those, like me who were *committed* to the war. You began to wonder, 'What am I really fighting for?' After Dr. King's death there was a greater sense of being black."[48] When one white veteran responded to continuing media coverage of the death of Dr. King with a racial slur, one black veteran recalled, "we commenced to give him a lesson in when to use that word and when not to use that word. A physical Lesson."[49] Such confrontations became more commonplace as the war dragged on. Occasionally, large-scale incidents grabbed the attention of the media. In October 1972, the front page of the *New York Times* carried a report of an incident on board the *U.S.S. Kitty Hawk* in October 1972 where forty-six sailors suffered injuries resulting from in a racial confrontation. Black sailors reportedly lashed out against their menial jobs and the perceived discrimination inherent in the navy.[50]

Compounding the problem for black soldiers, statistically more whites were likely to report incidents of racial assaults than black soldiers. One House Committee on Armed Services report found that penalties for African-American soldiers found guilty of misconduct tended to be harsher where the punishment was left to the discretion of white officers.[51] Morrocco Coleman, himself a victim of a trumped up criminal charge during his tour of duty, wrote Lyndon Johnson and *Ebony Magazine* to complain of, "the

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[47] Ibid., 98.

[48] Quoted in Myra Macpherson, *Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation, New Edition*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 555

[49] Quoted in Wallace Terry, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 167.

[50] Herman Graham III, *The Brothers' Vietnam War: Black Power, Manhood, and the Military Experience* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 120.

[51] Cited in ibid., 127.

disproportionate numbers of black GIs that were being court-martialed and rail roaded off to prison in Vietnam."[52]

The result of this combination of increased racial tension and, in the words of James Westheider, a "command structure [that] was overwhelmingly white, often racist, and usually apathetic to blacks concerns," was that the black soldier often suffered a disproportionate number of bad conduct or dishonorable discharges.[53] Consequently, many found that they could not obtain desperately needed benefits when they left the service. Given the lack of economic opportunities open to them in the 1960s, proportionally more African Americans had entered military service for economic advancement than their white counterparts.[54] As one veteran recalled, "There weren't many opportunities for blacks in private industry then. As a graduate of West Point, I was an officer and a gentleman by act of Congress. Where else could a black go and get that label just like that?"[55] But for many, a combination of low benefits and discriminatory discharges undermined that dream and made their post-service life less rewarding than they had anticipated.

Frustrated by the government response to their problems, veterans directed much if their ire toward the Veterans Administration. Much of the media criticism of the VA centered on the medical treatment of wounded Vietnam veterans. With advances in medical technology and the advent of medevac helicopters, Vietnam soldiers survived some injuries that would have proved fatal on the battlefields of World War II and even

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[52] Morocco Coleman, *Coming Full Circle* (Atlanta: Underground Epics Publishing, 2001), 63.

[53] Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts,* 111.

[54] Macpherson, *Long Time Passing*, 571.

[55] Terry, *Bloods*, 221.

Korea. As a consequence, the number of severely injured veterans increased proportionally after Vietnam. VA hospitals sometimes struggled to cope with such an influx of patients. Again, the press quickly picked up on stories of veteran neglect at VA hospitals. The *New York Times* opined, "Ironically, while the demands of war are endless for the youth called upon to risk their necks and limbs there, the wounded are not assured of receiving the utmost in medical care once back in the United States."[56] Further headlines such as "Crippled Veterans Find Hospitals Crowded and Attitudes at Home Ambiguous" and "Ex-G.I. Says Neglect Cost him an Eye" reflected a growing perception that the VA was failing its injured charges.[57] Exacerbating the problem, the *Nader Report* claimed that the VA allocated a majority of its thinly stretched resources to the chronic medical problems of its older veterans, often to the detriment of the wounded Vietnam veteran. *Life* magazine, in one of the more notorious stories of the mistreatment of veterans, published a series of images from the Bronx veterans' hospital in May 1970. The pictorial showed veterans in various states of neglect including images of wheelchair-bound veterans left sitting under running showers for hours at a time. Further charges arose in the press and in the veteran community that the VA failed to offer the necessary support to veterans plagued by drug addictions picked up in Vietnam. The VA did open up drug centers around the country to aid addicted veterans, but the perception grew that these efforts never went far enough.

Veterans and educators also cited the VA for their inefficient distribution of benefit checks. Many veterans complained of tardy payments or bureaucratic

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[56] *New York Times*, October 19, 1970, 39.
[57] *New York Times*, April 3, 1970, 19, and March 29, 1973, 51.

intransigence in the application process. Tim O'Brien slated the VA for, "Late checks, delayed checks. Unanswered telephones. Slothful, insensitive VA offices. Computers that stop payment on benefit checks if each item on complicated application forms isn't properly completed."[58] Joseph Mullholland, Assistant Dean of the Liberal Arts College at Fordham University described veterans benefits as, "inadequate [and] . . . often delayed for months," and described the VA's bureaucracy as, "all but impenetrable."[59]

Even more galling for most veterans, instead of acting as an advocate for higher veteran benefits the VA proved to be a mouthpiece for the White House's financial retrenchment. Chief culprit was Donald Johnson, Nixon's choice to succeed William Driver as head of the VA. Johnson, an imposing figure standing at six feet five inches tall, won a Bronze Star fighting in Europe in World War II. He also served as National Commander of the American Legion from 1964 to 1965. After an unsuccessful run at the governorship of Iowa, Johnson became an ardent supporter of Richard Nixon. In return, Nixon nominated him to head the VA in June 1969. But despite his military background and post-service experience with veterans, Johnson proved an unreliable friend of the Vietnam veteran. Johnson insisted, as did Nixon, that Vietnam veterans did indeed receive equitable benefits compared with their World War II counterparts. Claiming that benefits had kept pace with inflation, Johnson saw no need for blanket increases in education benefits and opposed any major increases that came up for debate in Congress. In April 1971, Johnson testified before the first ever hearings of the newly formed Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Though he spent most of his time discussing perceived

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[58] O'Brien, "Vietnam Veteran," 141.
[59] Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, May 21, 1971, 28.

problems within the VA medical system, he cited increasing use of the G.I. Bill among veterans as evidence of the program's success and noted that among recipients of education benefits, "Three out of five are attending college. Comparable percentages under prior GI Bills were 29 percent for World War II and 50 percent for the Korea conflict."[60]

Johnson's testimony laid the pattern for the administrator during his tenure of using participation rates and cost of living indices to cast the Vietnam G.I. Bill as a success. The problem with using such figures, as many critics pointed out, was that there existed as yet little statistical evidence to show how many veterans actually completed their courses and how many were forced to drop out because of financial pressures. Similarly, these number did not take into account the fact that higher education in the United States had become much more widespread since the original World War II G.I. Bill. Higher participation rates did not necessarily mean that the G.I. Bill was performing one of its intended functions of allowing veterans to catch up to their civilian counterparts in terms of educational opportunities. The original G.I. Bill gave veterans who might normally have not gone to college the opportunity to do so. But by the Vietnam era, far more Americans of all classes, colors, and creeds swelled campus rolls. Without corroborating data, Johnson's claim that participation rates indicated that the 1966 G.I. Bill was as meaningful to recipients as the World War II bill remained tenuous.

Moreover, Johnson expanded the argument made by Olin Teague in deliberations over the 1966 bill that education benefits under the G.I. Bill should provide nothing more

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[60] Briefing by Donald E. Johnson before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Folder 30, Box 254, Fred Harris Papers, Carl Albert Center.

than a helping hand for the veteran. Even though the original G.I. Bill had provided a *de facto* full ride for the vast majority of veterans, Johnson claimed that it was never intended to cover all of a veteran's education costs. This somewhat revisionist view of the G.I. Bill provided little comfort for the Vietnam era veteran hoping that their education benefits would be as beneficial to them as they had been to their predecessors.

Congressional testimony by VA officers highlighted further the VA's refusal to acknowledge possible problems with the G.I. Bill. Olney B. Owen, the VA's Chief Benefits Director appeared before a Subcommittee of the House Education and Training Committee on Veterans' Affairs in November 1971 to state the VA's position on several bills to increase education benefits awaiting congressional action. His testimony revealed the surprisingly strong opposition within the VA to proposals that would—without question—be of great benefit to the veterans. As had Johnson, Olney crowed that increasing numbers of veterans entering training signified the success of the G.I. Bill and added, "This impressive record results, we believe, from the motivation and drive of our veterans, encouraged by the active concern of the Congress and the President." Olney reiterated the VA's view that, "We recognize the GI Bill was not designed—and given the diversity of tuition charges among schools, could not be equitably designed—to cover all of a veteran's educational costs." Olney slated congressional proposals to increase veterans' benefits from 175 dollars a month to 220 dollars as inconsistent with Nixon's economic priorities. Completely ignoring such factors as rising tuition costs and the unfair burden placed in economically disadvantaged, he noted that the bills in front of Congress, "propose rate increases far in excess of price increases," and affirmed, "we oppose the enactment of these measures." Olney went on to state the VA's opposition to

proposals to make direct tuition payments to institutions for fear of "returning to the inequities of the World War II GI Bill program and the abuses which occurred," and also argued against a proposal to increase the period of benefits entitlement from thirty-six months to forty-eight.[61]

Few were convinced by the VA's line of argument. One *New York Times* editorial called Donald Johnson, "a proud legionnaire who has little sympathy for the plight of the new generation of veterans." The *Times* accused the VA of, "Taking its cues from an Administration whose idea of economy is billions for war with cutbacks at home, . . . [whilst failing] to ask for the funding necessary to make a dent in the problems veterans encounter."[62]

In an attempt to answer some of the criticisms leveled against them, the VA commissioned Louis Harris and Associates to conduct the first nationwide survey of Vietnam veterans. The study contained the responses of over 2,000 veterans polled during two weeks in August 1971 as well as almost 1,500 members of the public and over 700 employers in an attempt to ascertain veterans' problems and the public attitude to their return. One major focus of the report was on "the role of the Veterans' Administration in facilitating veterans' readjustment after separation from the Armed Forces."[63] The VA published the results in January 1972 under the title, *A Study of the*

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[61] Statement of Olney B. Owen, Chief VA benefits Director to Subcommittee of the House Education and Training Committee on Veterans' Affairs, November 30, 1971, Folder "Transcripts," Box 21, Stanley S. Scott Papers, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

[62] *New York Times*, September 15, 1972, 37.

[63] From Foreword by Vance Hartke for, *A Study of the Problems Facing Vietnam Veterans on Their Readjustment to Civilian Life* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), III.

Problems Facing Vietnam Veterans on Their Readjustment to Civilian Life. The results were somewhat equivocal.

Despite widespread complaints that veterans faced scorn and neglect upon their return to civilian life, the study found that overwhelmingly "The public and prospective employers clearly feel that veterans are deserving of the same respect and the warm reception accorded to returning veterans of previous wars."[64] Moreover, 79 percent of veterans agreed that "Most people at home respect you for having served your country in the armed forces," with 19 percent disagreeing.[65] The Nixon Administration received mixed responses for the assistance being offered returning veterans. Fifty-two percent of veterans agreed with the statement "The President and his Administration are doing all they can to help veterans readjust to civilian life," but 40 percent disagreed.[66] In their overall evaluation, veterans responded favorably to the VA. Sixty percent of Vietnam era veterans gave the VA a positive rating against a 31 percent negative rating. The report concluded that veterans were "highly positive about the job the VA is doing."[67]

Questions on education benefits elicited an ambiguous response from veterans. In general terms, education benefits ranked highest on the list of reasons given by veterans for their approval of the VA. Among veterans classified as "students" 66 percent gave the VA a positive approval. But when asked specifically about the level of benefits, the response told a different story. When asked if their benefits provided "More than enough to live on comfortably," only *1 percent* of student veterans replied affirmatively.

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[64] *A Study of the Problems Facing Vietnam Veterans on Their Readjustment to Civilian Life* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 2.

[65] Ibid., 10.

[66] Ibid., 11.

[67] Ibid., 230.

Seventy-four percent agreed that money for schooling under the G.I. Bill was "Not enough to live on comfortably."[68] "Non-white" veterans were more likely to give a negative assessment of the education benefits than their white counterparts.[69] These figures seemed to quantify many of the veterans' complaints that their benefits were inefficient. But Donald Johnson could, and did, take solace from the response given by veterans to another question. When asked for their overall satisfaction with "GI education benefits for school training," a surprisingly high 75 percent said they were "Satisfied" compared with only 23 percent that were "Dissatisfied."[70] The figures suggested, as Johnson had claimed, that most veterans did consider their education benefits welcome and important part of their rehabilitation and that many found them to be very beneficial. Veterans, it seemed, could go to college under their G.I. Bill, but could not live *comfortably* on what the government provided alone. Predictably, Johnson focused on the positive. He described the results of the study as "a real vote of confidence in the V.A. organization."[71]

Despite Johnson's satisfaction with the results, the study did little to assuage the continued media criticisms of the G.I. Bill and the intransigence of the VA. The ubiquitous focus on veterans' readjustment problems continued. Many—if not most—of the media reports written on these subjects contained degree of hyperbole. Newspaper and magazine articles continued to concentrate almost exclusively on the negative stories

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[68] Ibid., 237.

[69] Ibid., 237. The study only gave racial qualifiers for veterans not classified as students. Sixty-three percent of non-white veterans not classified as student agreed that the benefits were, "Not enough to live on comfortably," compared with 59 percent of white veterans.

[70] Ibid., 243.

[71] Quoted in the *New York Times*, January 6, 1972, 10.

of the veteran homecoming experience. The scorned veteran had become a hot topic. Sometimes the media went too far. Responding to the *Life* article on the Bronx Hospital, Donald Johnson accused the magazine of "outlandish" journalism that "provide[d] an utterly distorted picture of VA care."[72] The director of the hospital Dr. Abraham M. Kleinman accused the magazine of staging the pictures in order to present a negative image of patient care. Even more outrageous, the *New York Times* at one point suggested that 500,000 Vietnam veterans had attempted suicide. Considering that roughly three million soldiers served in Vietnam and of them only about 300,000 were exposed to combat on a regular basis, even a rudimentary application of logic should have revealed the error in the 500,000 figure. Several months later, the paper printed a retraction in which it admitted the figure had come from an unreliable source; by then, the story had already damaged further the public image of Vietnam veterans.[73]

The press was also guilty of reporting on *only* the negative stories of veteran hardship under the G.I. Bill. As the VA study had suggested, there were millions of returning veterans who were grateful of their benefits and a large majority found them to be at least "adequate." Even the NACV and Nader reports concurred that most veterans—if they chose their schools carefully and perhaps had some supplementary

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[72] Press Conference Remarks by Donald Johnson, May 25, 1970, Folder 46, Box 85, Carl Albert Collection, Departmental Files, Carl Albert Center.

[73] *New York Times*, August 27, 1975, 27. For an examination of the overstatement of veterans problems see B.G. Burkett and Glenna Whitley, *Stolen Valor: How the Vietnam Generation was Robbed of its Heroes and its History* (Dallas: Verity Press, 1998), Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), and Eric T. Dean Jr. *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam and the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

income—could fare quite well under the G.I. Bill, especially if they chose to attend in-state public schools.

The continued focus on the problems of the G.I. Bill, if sometimes overstated, did at least create a greater public awareness of the need for improved benefits, and slowly Washington began to take notice. Proposed increases in veteran benefits typically attract a lot of bipartisan support on Capitol Hill. The plight of the veteran can stir the patriotism of the hawkish Right or the nurturing instincts of the paternal Left. Moreover, a pro-veteran stance almost always plays well with voters. Consequently, as the 1960s drew to a close, there existed no shortage of politicians from both sides of the political spectrum, from Strom Thurmond to George McGovern, willing to stand up and fight for increased veteran benefits. However, motivated by various reasons—mostly financial—some within the government believed that there existed no need to introduce generous benefit increases for veterans. Between 1969 and 1974, the debate over how much a veteran's sacrifice is worth intensified in Washington. Unfortunately for veterans, the debates came at a time when the country faced a severe economic downturn and when the White House was under the watch of two presidents, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, who—despite their public statements to the contrary—placed veterans benefits low on their list of priorities. Only through concerted efforts in Congress—specifically in the Senate—did the more impoverished veterans find any relief in the coming years.

Chapter 4

SLOUCHING TOWARD EQUITY: SLOW PROGRESS UNDER THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION

> our veterans have long known that they must be champions of responsible government. They know the basic truth that a veterans' program not good for the nation as a whole cannot ultimately be of benefit to veterans themselves.
>
> President Richard Nixon

> I do not believe that we should begin by depriving our returning veterans of the just readjustment educational training under the G. I. Bill. I cannot in good conscience agree to lay this additional hardship on the backs of men who have already served our nation with such great courage.
>
> Senator Ralph Yarborough

In his 1971 political satire *Our Gang*, Philip Roth offered a scathing indictment of Richard Nixon as a politician whose public pronouncements bare little semblance to his behind-the-scenes ruminations or the cynical policies he tries to implement.[1] Roth chose to contrast "Trick E. Dixon's" platitudes on the sanctity of life in the abortion debate with his continued warmongering in Vietnam to parody Nixon's contradictory character. Had he examined Nixon's actions in the area of veterans' benefits, he would have found similar degrees of absurdity in what the President stated in public and what he attempted to do behind the scenes. Few politicians have ever spoken such glowing public expressions of support for the nation's veterans working so earnestly behind the scenes to limit the assistance so many of them needed. Even though veterans' benefits increased considerably during his time in office and he did sign into law a host of measures designed to help the more needy veterans, most of the advances made in veterans benefits occurred *in spite* of the Nixon and not because of him.

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[1] Philip Roth, *Our Gang* (New York: Random House, 1971).

Despite Nixon's obstinacy, the government during this period did not abandon veterans as much of the media implied. The Senate, in particular, worked hard to ensure that the G.I. Bill program became more effective for Vietnam veterans than it had been during its first couple of years. The improvements to veterans' benefits resulted from intense negotiation between the House, Senate, and White House. All agreed that the problems of the G.I. Bill needed addressing, but the proscriptions for solving these problems varied greatly. Complicating the negotiations, the Vietnam veteran returned home to a far different economic landscape than their World War II or Korean predecessors.

The World War II veteran returned home to an expanding economy that offered numerous opportunities for meaningful employment. Even though their G.I. Bill offered substantial benefits, many could eschew its generosity and find meaningful employment in the private sector. More importantly, the strength of the economy meant that the government could more easily absorb the enormous costs of providing such a generous benefits package. The Vietnam veteran came home at a time when the economy suffered its first significant downturn since the end of World War II. During Richard Nixon's first term, unemployment climbed from 3.5 percent to 5.6 percent and inflation rose from 5.6 percent to 8.7 percent. Gross domestic product also slowed to its lowest levels since the Truman administration.[2] Factors such as the enormous costs of the Vietnam War and the federal programs created under the Great Society as well as external factors such as the oil crisis during Nixon's second term compounded the nation's economic woes.

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[2] Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1990), 203.

Further straining the budget, the downturn in the economy coincided with unprecedented numbers of veterans entering society. Questions over the sheer cost of benefits had frequently arisen over the previous centuries of debate over veteran funding. At the end of the nineteenth century, such concerns caused a reevaluation of the veterans' benefits system and led to a more systematic application of benefits for World War I veterans. The spiraling cost of benefits led to the *Bradley Report* in 1956 and caused considerable opposition in the Bureau of the Budget to the 1966 G.I. Bill. By the early 1970s, such fears seemed justified as the costs of offering medical care, pensions, education benefits, etc. skyrocketed. When the Department of Defense reduced its manpower needs as the country began its slow extrication from Vietnam, many more came home to claim their share of federal benefits. From a high of 543,000 military personnel in South Vietnam at the end of 1968, the United States had only 24,200 by the end of 1972.[3] Millions more who had not served in Vietnam also reentered society during the same period. Between 1969 and 1972 over a million new veterans per year reentered civilian life.[4] By mid 1972 the presence of an almost continuous draft since 1940 created 28,804,000 veterans in society, with millions more dependants also eligible for benefits.[5] Now the costs of a peacetime G.I. Bill were becoming apparent. By 1972, the VA administered 1.7 billion dollars in education assistance. In contrast, despite all of the new education programs brought in under the Great Society, the Department of

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[3] George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal,* Second Edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1994), 415.

[4] Ibid.

[5] VA statistics cited in *Congress and the Nation, Volume III, 1969-1972* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1973), 537.

Health, Education, and Welfare administered only 1.47 billion dollars in educational assistance.[6]

Further draining the VA's resources, the aging World War I and World War II generations began to require increased medical attention. The VA's share of the federal budget rose from 3.8 percent in 1968 to 4.7 percent for the fiscal year 1972. The VA spent 6.9 billion dollars on veterans' services in 1968; by 1973 this figure had risen to 11.8 billion dollars.[7] The precarious state of the economy and the rising costs of veterans' benefits occurred precisely at the time that the media began to clamor for better treatment of the Vietnam veteran. This combination created a fraught economic and political landscape for the new president.

Nixon won a narrow election victory in 1968 by occupying the political center. In the eyes of many, the Great Society had exceeded its legitimacy. The Vietnam War, urban unrest, and the vast expansion of federal power alienated many lower and middle class Americans and shattered the New Deal liberal consensus. Nixon won the Republican Party's nomination as a moderate conservative candidate positioned between the more liberal Nelson Rockefeller and the more right-wing Ronald Reagan. During his first term, he maintained this centrist position, seeking a New Majority of Americans that believed the government had neglected their needs and concerns.

Like Eisenhower before him, Nixon sought a degree of fiscal responsibility without entirely rolling back the New Deal or Great Society. Early on in his administration, he prioritized a reduction in federal spending in an effort to slow down

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[6] Estimates from *Congress and the Nation, Volume III, 1969-1972*, (Washington D.C.: Congressional Record Quarterly, Inc., 1973), 582.

[7] Ibid., 537.

what he termed "the excesses of 1966, 1967, and 1968."[8] Less than a week after his inauguration, he circulated a memo to the heads of all Executive departments and agencies, including the Veterans Administration, in which he called for "a careful and thorough review" of the budget. In an effort to restrain what he termed the "present excessive rate of price inflation in our economy," he called on federal agencies to "identify activities of low priority which can be reduced or phased down and perhaps, over time, eliminated completely."[9] But his budget cuts were not drastic. In fact, far from repudiating the welfare state he expanded it in many ways during his first term.

Despite his popular image as a conservative, Nixon's biographers point out that he was no great ideologue. Stephen Ambrose described him as a "moderate republican," Iwan Morgan calls him "the last liberal president" and the "most liberal Republican president in U.S. history."[10] Allen J. Matusow casts Nixon as an "enlightened centrist—a conservative man of liberal views.[11] Finally, Joan Hoff, in *Nixon Reconsidered* (1994) points to Nixon's impressive list of social legislation and federal regulations as evidence that he expanded and redirected the New Deal.[12] Such initiatives included continued federal support to education, an expansion of the National Park System and the Rail Passenger Service Act that created Amtrak. He also enacted major environmental initiatives including the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during a

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[8] Quoted in Small, *Richard Nixon*, 207.

[9] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Richard M. Nixon*, "Memorandum on the Need for a Review of the Budget," January 25, 1969.

[10] Stephen Ambrose, *Nixon, Volume II: The Triumph of a Politician* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 431. Iwan Morgan, *Nixon* (London: Arnold, 2002), 69, 93.

[11] Allen J. Matusow, *Nixon's Economy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 4.

[12] Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

1970 cabinet reorganization, and signed the Clean Air Act, the Noise Control Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act. He also expanded the Bureau of Indian Affairs and signed the Indian Education Act of 1972. His proposed Family Assistance Plan would have expanded greatly the welfare state by guaranteeing a minimum income to the poorest families.

But there were certainly limits to Nixon's liberalism. In 1971, he opposed the Child Development Act that would have given free childcare to the poor, and later on in his administration slashed funding to the EPA and many of the Great Society's social programs such as the Office of Economic Opportunity. He proved equally equivocal in his education record. In 1972 he signed into law the Education Amendments of 1972 which greatly expanded the provisions of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and introduced new measures such as the Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (BEOGs) which offered an annual grant of 1,400 dollars to all students with certain deductions made for parental contributions.[13] Early on in his administration, Nixon also called for federal assistance to be redirected to the needs of the poor through a series of additional grants and loans.[14] But Nixon also vetoed an appropriations bill for the Departments of Health, Labor, Education, and Welfare in January 1970 because of its cost, claiming "it is in the vital interests of all Americans in stopping the rise in the cost of living." Later that same year he vetoed an additional appropriations bill for the Office of Education for similar reasons.[15]

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[13] *Congress and the Nation, Vol. III,* 602-603.
[14] Ibid., 598.
[15] Ibid., 581.

Moreover, Congress must take much of the credit for the "liberal" proposals signed by the President, including the 1972 Education Amendments Act. The BEOG's for example came from a Senate initiative. In addition, many of Nixon's environmental polices aimed to steal the thunder of potential presidential challenger Edmund Muskie who had been at the forefront of the battle for environmental legislation long before Nixon became interested.[16] As Arthur Schlesinger Jr. noted, to protect his middle ground constituency, Nixon often just "rolled with the punches and went along with a reform-minded Congress."[17] It was Congress—especially the Senate—that landed the punches during the fights for higher veteran benefits throughout Nixon's term. The country's economic plight did little to dampen Congress's enthusiasm for the veteran cause. Supporting the nation's veterans has typically been one of the safer issues to which a politician can adhere. As the public awareness of veterans' troubles grew, increasing numbers of politicians from both parties joined Ralph Yarborough in pushing for increased benefits. But the calls were neither uniform nor unified.

By the end of the 1960s, a clear order emerged in how far the different parts of government were prepared to go in helping the veteran. The Senate regularly proves itself the more munificent with federal funds, and throughout the Vietnam era, Yarborough and other members of the Senate proved to be the best friends the Vietnam veteran had in government. Since the Eisenhower Administration, the White House, for either ideological or fiscal reasons, continued to provide the strongest opposition to the

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[16] See Paul C. Milazzo "The Environment" in Julian Zelizer, *The American Congress: The Building of Democracy* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 611-614.

[17] Quoted in Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 114.

Senate's efforts. Despite spewing more rhetoric in support of Vietnam veterans than perhaps any other politician, Nixon sought to keep benefits increases low. As with much of his social legislation, he never repudiated the idea of offering federal assistance to those in need, he just sought to place a lower ceiling on how far that assistance should go. In between the generosity of the Senate and the thrift of the White House, the House, under the stewardship of Olin Teague, sought a middle ground that generally pleased neither the veterans, nor the Senate, nor the White House, but which generally proved to be the most politically acceptable. The debates over H.R.11959 revealed clearly the emergence of these roles.

On August 4, 1969, the House voted on H.R.11959, a proposal to increase veterans' benefits by 27 percent, raising the monthly educational allowance to 165 dollars. A veteran with one dependant could claim 197 dollars, up from 155 dollars. Concerns over the low usage of the 1966 G.I. Bill during its early years prompted this call for an increase. Numerous congressmen raised concerns that only approximately 20 percent of Vietnam veterans had thus far claimed their education benefits. In the floor debate on the bill, several representatives claimed that passage of the increase would lead to many more veterans flooding into higher education. Further, Frank Annunzio (D-IL) crowed, "many words have been spoke in this Chamber about support for our fighting men overseas, and such words have not fallen on deaf years."[18] Spark Matsunaga (D-HI) added, "In the face of today's rising tuition as well as rising cost of living, the undergraduate veteran can hardly be said to be going to school in lavish style on his VA

[18] *Congressional Record-House*, August 4, 1969, 22080.

allowance."[19] Others suggested that the need for the increase was "clear and indisputable," and that the bill was "long overdue," and "the very least that we in Congress can do for them."[20] A very self-satisfied House then passed the bill by a vote of 404-0. The House had some cause to be pleased because at least their benefits increase far outweighed the one sought by the White House.

Nixon's proscription for easing the veteran's plight was considerably less generous than that of the House. In June 1969, he created a President's Committee on the Vietnam Veterans to study the veterans' readjustment needs and make recommendations for legislation. Donald Johnson headed the panel, which also contained then director of the Office of Economic Opportunity Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, and Secretary of Labor George Shultz. After early deliberations, and long before they published their final report, the committee recommended a much smaller education rise than those currently under consideration on the Hill. The committee noted that the cost of living had risen only 10 percent since the last benefits increase in October 1967 and that education costs had increased by approximately 15 percent in the same period. In a recommendation that Nixon could endorse with equanimity, the committee suggested that the benefits increase should not exceed these figures.[21] In the wake of the interim report, he advocated only a 13 percent increase.

Before the Senate voted on H.R.11959, Nixon went on the offensive, attempting to persuade Capitol Hill and the nation of the need for frugality. On October 19, he

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[19] Ibid., 22080.

[20] Ibid., 22081.

[21] *Public Papers, Nixon*, "Letter to Senator Ralph Yarborough on Proposed Increases in Veterans Educational Benefits," October 21, 1969.

addressed the nation on "the Rising Costs of Living." Criticizing the polices of his Democratic predecessors, Nixon claimed, "The blame for the spiral of wages and prices falls fundamentally on the past policies of your Government. The Federal Government spent a lot more than it raised in taxes. Some of that spending was on the war in Vietnam, some of the spending was on new social programs, but the total spending was very heavy." He went on to laud the reductions in federal spending that had occurred over the previous nine months, noting, "hardly anything has escaped some reduction." Veterans' benefits had avoided cuts in this period, but they had not been elevated either, even as the President lamented the considerable increase in the cost of living. Although Nixon did not refer specifically to veterans in his message, he steeled all Americans for further "bitter medicine" that lay ahead and pledged, "We are going to continue to exercise that backbone in the face of criticism by a lot of powerful special interests." Nixon had laid down his economic marker, but was politically shrewd enough not to call publicly for cuts in veterans' benefits. However, in private, he made his feelings known to Ralph Yarborough.[22]

Two days before the Senate debated H.R.11959, Nixon wrote Yarborough to express his "deep concerns" over the costs of the measure. Citing that the bill would cost an additional 393 million dollars over next year that would have to be culled from other important programs, Nixon informed Yarborough:

> I am in sympathy with a justifiable increase in educational allowances for post-Korean and Vietnam Era veterans. Yet, I consider the magnitude of the increases contained in H.R. 11959 to require reconsideration for two reasons. The proposed rates are excessive and their effect would be inflationary. . . . It is not

[22] *Public Papers, Nixon*, "Address to the Nation on the Rising Cost of Living," October 19, 1969.

> easy to criticize the pending bill for it promises some appealing benefits to a most deserving group. But our veterans have long known that they must be champions of responsible government. They know the basic truth that a veterans' program not good for the nation as a whole cannot ultimately be of benefit to veterans themselves.[23]

Like Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, and Lyndon Johnson before him, Nixon seemed to believe that the best way to help the nation was to adopt universal measures and not favor one particular group. But whereas Roosevelt and Johnson sought give everyone a share of the nation's wealth, Nixon expected everyone to sacrifice. This negative universalism did not play well with veterans who had already sacrificed far more than most other members of society.

Teague also expressed his reservations over Yarborough's attempts to escalate G.I. Bill benefits even further. Teague believed that the Cold War G.I. Bill had already proven a success and that much of the criticisms leveled against it were premature. In a formal statement, he launched a thinly veiled attack on Yarborough and what he deemed a rabid press in which he claimed:

> Recently, there were several news stories and editorials, based on the inaccurate statement of a misinformed critic of the GI bill. That lamented the alleged low numbers of Vietnam era veterans taking training under the bill.
>
> The entire episode was unfortunate, first because there is no factual basis for such criticism. The current bill is a good, workable education measure that is attracting a larger percentage of trainees into higher education than either the World War II or Korean bills.
>
> It was unfortunate because such unfounded, carping criticism serves only to do harm to a program that has proven one of the most successful and most beneficial to the eligible recipients, and to this Government.[24]

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[23] Ibid., "Letter to Senator Ralph Yarborough on Proposed Increases in Veterans Educational Benefits," October 21, 1969.

[24] Statement by Chairman Olin E. Teague on Post-Korean GI Bill of Rights, attached to a letter to Carl Albert from Olin Teague, October 8, 1969, Folder 72, Box 124, Carl Albert Legislative Papers, Carl Albert Center.

According to Teague, the low percentage of veterans taking advantage of the bill during the first two and a half years of the program still represented a greater number than had taken advantage of the World War II bill in a comparable period. Once the program had run its course, he suggested, the numbers of participating veterans would increase to, and even surpass, the levels of the previous bills. Teague also praised the efforts of the VA for its outreach programs and Veteran Centers, which he described as a part of "the most widespread program of benefit information in its history."[25]

Teague correctly lauded the VA for getting information out to veterans. At the end of the 1960s, the VA made an unprecedented effort to inform veterans of their benefits and how to obtain them. In addition to establishing a nationwide system of United States Veteran Assistance Centers, or USVACs, VA officials regularly visited Vietnam after January 1967 to inform future veterans of their entitlements. According to Donald Johnson, the VA had counseled nearly two million veterans by September 1970 and two VA employees had already lost their lives in Vietnam. The VA sent representatives into their hospitals helping patients fill out benefits applications.[26] The agency also mailed letters to all veterans upon separation informing them of their entitlements and then sent out pamphlets annually with updated information on what the veteran could receive. If these measures failed, the veteran could call VA officials in over thirty-four cities to obtain further information and application assistance on a toll free number. World War II veterans and Korea veterans had no such outreach program.

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Letter to Carl Albert from Donald E. Johnson, September 17, 1970, Folder 45, Box 85, Carl Albert Departmental Papers, Carl Albert Center.

In terms of disseminating information, the VA had indeed surpassed itself during the Vietnam era. Referring to Yarborough's public criticisms of the VA, Teague wrote Carl Albert, "Senator Yarborough's observations on this subject have always been a myth, and I cannot understand why he continues to make public statements which are not borne out by facts."[27]

But in his public comments, Yarborough's critique of the VA centered more on their obstruction to increased benefits rather than the services they provided. On the floor of the Senate, he blamed the VA for being "largely responsible—probably under prodding by the Bureau of Budget—for keeping the veterans out of school."[28] And having spent the best part of a decade fighting for veterans against stubborn resistance from three different administrations and Teague's House Veterans Affairs Committee, Yarborough was in no mood to lay down the sword. He replied to Nixon's letter on October 22, and informed the President:

> I share your concerns for protecting the economy from the potentially damaging effects of runaway inflation. . . . However, I do not believe that we should begin by depriving our returning veterans of the just readjustment educational training under the G. I. Bill. I cannot in good conscience agree to lay this additional hardship on the backs of men who have already served our nation with such great courage.[29]

The following day, Yarborough and the Senate put these sentiments into practice. On October 23, after the bill emerged from several months in different committees, the

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[27] Letter to Carl Albert from Olin Teague, October 8, 1969, Folder 72, Box 124, Carl Albert Legislative Papers, Carl Albert Center.

[28] *Congressional Record-Senate*, October 23, 1969, 31362.

[29] Letter to Richard Nixon from Ralph Yarbrough, October 22, 1969, Folder 72, Box 124, Carl Albert Legislative Papers, Carl Albert Center.

Senate voted on H.R.11959. Despite retaining the name of Teague's bill, the Senate version bore little resemblance to the version passed by the House in August.

When it left committee, the Senate's H.R.11959 had provisions from nine separate Senate bills attached to it that drastically changed the nature of the bill. Title I called for a simple increase in the monthly education allowance to 190 dollars up from the 135 dollars for single veterans. Yarborough had proposed an increase of this size in his bill, S.338. Alan Cranston (D-CA) opened the debate on the Senate floor by defending Yarborough's substantial rate increase. Cranston claimed that, whereas the Korea G.I. Bill had paid approximately 98 percent of a veteran's total education costs, the Cold War G.I. Bill covered only 67 percent due to the increased costs of tuition. The 190 dollars a month, he suggested, would equate to 98 percent of the veteran's needs compared with the House increase to 160 dollars that equated to only 85 percent of a veteran's needs. He described Nixon's suggestion of a 13 percent rise as "wholly untenable" and called on his fellow senators to give veterans "the level of benefits which they need and deserve to help them in their education and training."[30]

Yarborough supported Cranston's comments, suggesting that, based on Office of Education figures, his increase would make the benefits offered under the Cold War G.I. Bill comparable to those offered under the 1952 G.I. Bill. He also reaffirmed the Senate's dedication to pushing for generous benefits by revealing the bipartisan support the bill gained in committee and further noting that "the only question was what could we do to give our veterans a fair chance in life." Highlighting the difficulties the Senate had faced in convincing the White House of the need for the increases he lamented, "The goal

[30] *Congressional Record-Senate*, October 23, 1969, 31341.

of greater educational benefits for veterans has been pursued under three presidents and it has been a hard fight every step of the way."[31] In the Senate, at least, he met little opposition and no one raised any significant objections to the proposed increases.

Title II of the Senate bill separated it even further from the original House measure by offering "Special Assistance for Educationally Disadvantaged Veterans." This section of the bill offered veterans the opportunity to take college preparation courses such as remedial reading at a local college without cutting into their higher education benefits. Veterans could also claim up to 100 dollars a month for "special remedial, tutorial, or counseling assistance to enable the educationally disadvantaged veteran to perform satisfactorily in the course he is pursuing."[32] The VA would administer grants to participating schools to offset their costs. The Senate also called for a Predischarge Education Program (PREP) under which the VA would pay for similar preparation courses in local schools for veterans before they left the service. The final measure called for the VA to increase its number of USVAC centers to incorporate areas that were more rural possibly by using mobile vet centers.

Two main factors lay behind the Title II's extensive and groundbreaking proposals. The first was a desire to increase the number of veterans taking advantage of the program. Department of Defense studies confirmed a widespread suspicion that the less educated a veteran was, the less likely they were to use their education benefits. By creating programs that would increase both the desire and ability of disadvantaged or undereducated veterans to enter higher education, the Senate hoped to increase

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[31] Ibid., 31344.
[32] As printed in ibid., 31342.

participation of these groups in the G.I. Bill program. The second factor in the Senate's proposals was the enduring legacy of the Great Society. Johnson may have vacated the White House, but Congress still contained plenty of adherents to his liberal crusade of helping the most disadvantaged in society. No previous G.I. Bill had ever offered such assistance to those in greatest need. World War II and Korean veterans had received blanket benefits without any consideration given to class or economic need. Although the monthly benefit level remained constant under the Senate's proposals, the new measures aimed to benefit those that needed additional help. The Senate passed the revised version of H.R.11959 by a vote of 77-0. Once more, the Senate had given veterans a more generous benefits package than either the White House or the House envisioned.

Almost immediately, Nixon and Teague reverted to type and sought ways of reducing the Senate measure. Nixon's main concerns over the Senate's bill remained economic rather than ideological. White House aides had attempted to persuade Republicans to raise objections to the bill during the floor debate, but there was little stomach for such a fight.[33] Few wanted the political risks of opposing such a popular cause. In a pattern that would repeat itself in the years ahead, Nixon lacked either the force or finesse to impose his will on Congress in the way his immediate predecessors had. Eisenhower, for example, had established a legislative liaison office in the 1950s to keep close contact with events in Congress. Lyndon Johnson brought his own special "treatment" to congressional relations. But Nixon put little effort into sweet-talking congressional leaders. Stephen Ambrose described Nixon as "the least effective

[33] *New York Times*, November 5, 1969, 28.

President in dealing with Congress since Herbert Hoover."[34] White House congressional aide Bill Timmons noted that Nixon believed that pandering to the congressional egos was somehow beneath him and "It was not in his personality to do it."[35] Nixon's Senate liaison Patrick O' Donnell confirmed that the President was "not comfortable dealing with Congress on a daily basis."[36]

Nixon could at least count himself fortunate that he had a fellow fiscal conservative like Teague in such an influential position in the House to restrain the more munificent sectors of Congress. In December, during House debates over the Senate amendments, Teague cited the threat of a presidential veto as reason to reject the Senate's measures and instead proposed a 32 percent increase in benefits. After failing to block the bill's passage in the Senate Nixon revealed that he might veto such an expensive package should it arrive on his desk in its present form. Senator John J. Williams (R-DE) believed that if the bill went forward to the White House, "the President will have no choice but to veto it, and I think that veto will be sustained."[37] After the House rejected the Senate bill, both houses then sent H.R.11959 back into conference to reconcile the significant differences in cost and type of their respective bills. Three months passed before they could be reach a compromise.

The report emerged from committee in mid-March. Conferees agreed on a monthly increase of 34.6 percent, elevating a single veteran's payments to 175 dollars per

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[34] Ambrose, *Nixon, Volume II*, 431.

[35] Quoted in Morgan, *Nixon*, 164.

[36] Quoted in Karen M. Hunt and Charles E. Walcott, *Empowering the White House: Governance Under Nixon, Ford, and Carter* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 121.

[37] Quoted in the *New York Times*, October 24, 1969, 27.

month. Cranston claimed that Senate conferees "fought tenaciously" for higher rates but could do no better.[38] The House accepted most of the Senate's proposals to help the disadvantaged albeit with some reductions. For example, veterans would receive a supplementary monthly benefit of fifty dollars for remedial courses instead of the Senate proposed 100 dollars. The House agreed to such measures as increasing the VA's outreach program, and the provision of funds to schools participating in PREP. The Senate dropped its calls to offer farm training under the G.I. Bill and acquiesced to the House request to deny payments for some more obscure vocational courses. The House accepted the conference report on March 18, the Senate on March 23. Cranston called the passage of H.R.11959 as "a momentous day for all Vietnam veterans." Yarborough cautioned, "we must continue our efforts."[39]

Nixon signed the bill without any public ceremony on March 26, 1970. Despite his opposition to the costs of the bill and the damage it would do to his budget targets, he decided against a veto simply because of the weight of support it carried in Congress. Having passed both houses unanimously, Nixon realized that he had no chance of sustaining a veto and—still clinging to his dream of a moderate New Majority—did not want to risk the political ramifications of such action. In announcing that Nixon had signed the bill, White House Press Secretary Ron Zeigler noted that it would break the President's budget by 107 million dollars and a further 186 million for the fiscal year

[38] *Congressional Record-Senate*, March 23, 1970, 8652.
[39] Ibid., 8652

1971. However, Zeigler conceded that the extra money was for a worthy cause and that the administration believed "that this is reasonable."[40]

Here Nixon revealed his political pragmatism. He realized Congress held the upper hand in these debates and that the time for opposition had passed. Moreover, he used the occasion to announce several new initiatives designed, in part, to preempt the measures to aid underprivileged veterans already suggested by Congress. The President's Commission on the Vietnam Veteran finally submitted its report in March, just before the signing of the bill and almost six months after it was due. The commission shared Congress's view that the government ought to do more to aid veterans beyond simple increases in benefit levels. Based on their recommendations, Nixon liberalized the provisions for hiring veterans in federal positions. He also called for advanced payments of education benefits to help less well off veterans attend school. Up to this point, veterans received their checks after enrolling, which meant that they often had to have some upfront money to cover initial school costs. The executive order also directed the VA to underwrite loans for mobile homes. As Congress had desired, he also expanded the in-service program to help veterans prepare for college. Such a service had already been available to servicemen who had served more than two years, the new measure opened up this opportunity for those who had served only six months. Finally, the executive order offered business loans and training for disadvantaged veterans. The new initiatives covered nearly four million veterans that had served since August 1964. In

[40] Quoted in the *New York Times*, March 29, 1970, 37.

signing the order, Nixon affirmed "This nation has an obligation to assist veterans of the armed forces in readjusting to civilian life."[41]

The VA took some convincing before accepting the value of the new programs to aid poorer veterans. They feared that the tailoring of benefits to specific social groups or classes might pervert the original intent of the G.I. Bill and make veterans benefits a force for selective social engineering. But Donald Johnson was instrumental in the drafting of the report of the Veterans Committee, prompting one official to state that the VA was now "willing to go after—I mean really go after—the poor black kid who dropped out of high school to go fight in Vietnam."[42]

At least on the surface, Nixon appeared to accept the need for increased government assistance for veterans. His public show of support for benefit increases and his new initiatives suggested that he had reached an accord with congressional leaders on the government's obligation to Vietnam veterans. Even though he initially opposed the increases, he signed them into law and added additional measures not sought by Congress. But as with almost every other episode in Nixon's presidency, no such generalizations adequately reveal his true character, for even as he gave with one hand, he took away with another. Despite accepting significant increases in education spending, Nixon slashed money from the VA's hospital expansion program. In 1972, he pocket vetoed the Veterans' Health Care Expansion Act that would have provided an additional eighty-five million dollars to the VA for health care. The act, he claimed,

[41] Quoted in ibid.
[42] Quoted in ibid., March 27, 1970, 16.

"unnecessarily adds hundreds of millions of dollars to the federal budget."[43] Throughout his term, Nixon attracted heavy criticism from the media, the veteran community and on Capitol Hill for cutting veterans' medical facilities. He still had a long way to go before the veterans considered him a friend. Unfortunately for Vietnam veterans, they were about to lose the best friend they did have in government.

After the departure of Lyndon Johnson, Ralph Yarborough fought on for the liberal values they both shared. In 1969, he became chair of the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee. Having achieved so much in education he turned his attentions to improving nation's health care. As one of the nation's leading liberals, he launched regular verbal attacks on the Nixon Administration, including regular assaults on Nixon's Vietnam policy. Biographer Patrick Cox notes that at this time Yarborough "relished his role as a political maverick."[44] The *Dallas Morning Star* described him as the "least southern Senator" for his views on social policy. Unfortunately for Yarborough, the nation, and Texas politics in particular, had moved away from the idealism he, Kennedy, Johnson, and others had brought into politics in the early 1960s.

In the Texas primary for the 1970 Senate election, Yarborough faced Democratic challenger Lloyd Bentsen Jr. Few expected a strong challenge, and Yarborough spent much of the campaign continuing his work in Washington. But in the final few weeks Bentsen ran Nixon-like television advertisements promising law and order and connecting incumbent with violent images of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. The challenger also attacked Yarborough's calls for a Vietnam War

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[43] Quoted in *Congress and the Nation, Vol. III,* 548.

[44] Patrick Cox, *Ralph Yarborough: The People's Senator* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 255.

moratorium, his failure to support Nixon's war policy, and his support of Eugene McCarthy in 1968. In a move that surely rankled Yarborough given their previous run-ins, fellow Texan Olin Teague decided to throw his support behind Bentsen. In a close and sometimes nasty fight, Yarborough lost the party's nomination for reelection. Despite all he had achieved in his thirteen years in the Senate, the same tide that had brought Richard Nixon to power and had already begun to wash away some of the foundations of the Great Society swept Yarborough from politics. The veterans had lost their greatest champion on the Hill.

Few individual politicians had ever done as much as Yarborough in promoting the veteran cause. The Cold War G.I. Bill had been one of his greatest legislative achievements in a career of fighting for worthy causes. He had faced concerted opposition to the bill ever since he first proposed it in 1959, but he never wavered in his convictions. Through his efforts, millions of veterans that served since the end of the Korean War were able to return home and improve their lives through education and training. The consequences of the bill were wide ranging. The nature of military service changed, making it possible for citizens to enter the military as a means of obtaining benefits without ever having to serve during a time of war. Veterans had retained and enlarged their privileged status in society and the government now had a massively expensive obligation to a new generation of soldiers. Such concerns were always secondary to Yarborough. His motivation was always to give the veteran the greatest assistance possible. He recognized the veterans' sacrifices and accepted the government's obligations to those who served. He did not care about costs or the questions of citizenship and obligation that had surfaced in the past. The same sense of

humanity and crusading zeal he had carried throughout his public life and had taken into his support for the more enlightened Great Society legislation infused his fight for a new G.I. Bill. Few shared his views at first, but through his tireless work and against the backdrop of the war in Vietnam, Yarborough prevailed.

Perhaps one of the greatest testaments to Yarborough's achievements was that after his departure, former colleagues continued his crusade. The culture of fighting for higher veteran benefits that he had created in the Senate outlived his own tenure on the Hill. To the fore of these battles stepped Indiana Democrat Vance Hartke. Hartke, another World War II veteran having served in the Coast Guard and navy, joined the Senate in 1959. In 1970, he became chairman of the newly created Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.[45] As the next round of benefits proposals entered both Houses, Hartke ably stepped up to maintain the Senate tradition of pushing for the most liberal benefits package.

The House again acted first—but cautiously—by proposing H.R.12828, The Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1972, a new G.I. Bill proposing to raise veteran benefits from 175 dollars a month to 200 dollars. The bill also called for raises in vocational training from 108 dollars a month to 160 dollars, a 48 percent increase, and liberalized the requirements for spouses and children to take vocational courses. Several of the bill's architects claimed that the increases would fulfill the promise of the 1966 G.I. Bill. John Saylor (R-PA) noted that the bill provides a "much

[45] Until 1970, the Senate had discussed veteran issues in a subcommittee of the Labor and Public Welfare Committee and occasionally in the Finance Committee. The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 created the first ever Senate committee devoted exclusively to veteran affairs. The House had had such a committee since 1924.

needed increase," but maintained that the 1966 bill was only ever designed to "meet in part the cost of obtaining an education." John Hammerschmidt (R-AR) reaffirmed, "It will carry out the purpose of the original GI bill which was designed to provide an educational assistance allowance to meet, in part, the expenses of subsistence, tuition, fees, supplies, books, and equipment."[46] But other representatives recognized the shortcomings of the bill. Elwood Hillis (R-IN) lamented, "I thought our Vietnam era veterans deserved tuition payments. . . . I think we can do better."[47] Marvin Esch (R-WI), himself a recipient of the World War II G.I. Bill said, "I believe that we should offer the same benefits to our veterans today."[48] Esch ended his attack by issuing a plea to the Senate to correct the deficiencies of the House bill. The Senate duly obliged.

The Senate waited until August 3 to vote on their version of the bill, and once more, their proposal was far more generous than that offered in House. The Senate kept the House designation H.R.12828 but attached the central features of Hartke's own S.2161. Hartke's bill offered veterans a 43 percent increase in the monthly allowance, raising the benefit from 175 dollars to 250 dollars. As with all of the G.I. Bills, the amount increased proportionally with the number of dependents a veteran claimed. The bill also created work-study programs for veterans, allowing them to earn up to 300 dollars in an advance payment for undertaking up to 120 hours of work for the VA. The bill also loosened the eligibility requirements for spouses of veterans to receive remedial training without affecting their entitlements for secondary education. Other features included increased farm training benefits, the option for veterans to use their benefits for

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[46] *Congressional Record-House*, March 6, 1972, 6954.
[47] Ibid., 6955.
[48] Ibid., 6956-6957.

overseas schools, and called for greater assistance to disabled veterans in obtaining federal employment. The most controversial feature of the Senate bill was the provision for low interest loans to veterans. Under Title V of the bill, veterans could claim up to 1,575 dollars to cover costs not covered by other federally available loan programs. Although the provision of loans was not as generous as giving them outright grants, veterans could at least have another option to ease their financial concerns.

The architects of the bill clearly believed that these proposals would bring the much needed and often called for parity with the benefits offered World War II veterans. Alan Cranston asked his fellow senators, "who would argue that the Vietnam era veteran should not, at long last, receive a rate of assistance under the present GI bill which is comparable to the level of assistance under the World War II GI bill?" He called the need for comparable benefits "a moral imperative for the Nation."[49] Hartke claimed that his increase would "finally . . . provide true parity of benefits with the World War II GI bill. He conceded the considerable costs of the bill, but added "the cost of the war which created these veterans is more expensive . . . the question that we face today is not: 'Can we afford to do it,' but rather 'Can we afford not to do it.'"[50] The other senators clearly shared his views and passed the bill by a vote of 89-0. Not for the first time, and certainly not for the last, the Senate had passed a generous G.I. Bill and now had to wait for the House to launch their standard counterattack.

Indeed, after Teague got his hands back on the bill, H.R.12828 once more became a far less generous measure than the Senate sought. Conferees offered a monthly

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[49] *Congressional Record-Senate*, August 3, 1972, 26745.
[50] Ibid., 26719.

allowance increase of only 25.7 percent, elevating payments to 220 dollars a month. Veterans with dependents obtained higher percentage increases to reflect their greater needs. The amount of extra income a veteran could earn from work-study programs dropped to 250 dollars for 100 hours. Significantly, the Senate "reluctantly" agreed to drop their provision to offer loans. The House and the Veterans' Administration claimed that such loans were not necessary because of other universal student loans programs veterans could utilize. Hartke pledged to "monitor" veteran loan claims to see if they were using the other loan programs.[51] After several other compromises on secondary issues, the Senate passed the bill and sent it to Nixon. Although the compromise bill, in essence, amounted to little more than a simple increase in the monthly allowance, Hartke claimed, "the results we have obtained represent a substantial and perhaps even historic movement forward . . . [and] a giant step toward recognizing the enormous debt we owe to our Nation's veterans."[52] Although Hartke seemed quite satisfied with his efforts, the veterans still had to wait for the kinds of benefits they hoped for and deserved. The NACV had called the original Senate bill "a clear effort toward meeting today's veterans' needs."[53] As it stood, the final bill fell short of that goal.

Once more, Nixon used the passage of a bill he had attempted to thwart to reaffirm his commitment to the Vietnam veteran. He had advocated an increase to only 190 dollars a month, but Congress ignored his pleas. Nixon preempted the signing of the 1972 G.I. Bill with a radio address in which he boasted:

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[51] Ibid., October 13, 1972, 35807.

[52] Ibid., 35804.

[53] Letter to Vance Hartke from James M. Mayer, NACV president, reprinted in ibid, August 3, 26743.

> As President I have done everything I can to see to it that this gratitude and respect is reflected by the Government's treatment of American veterans. Dollars, health care, educational opportunities can never fully repay the sacrifices our veterans have made, but they can at least serve as a beginning. I am happy to be able to report that America is doing more for its veterans today than ever before.

Failing to mention his own continued opposition to higher benefits and slashing of VA funds for medical care, he crowed that "We" have raised education benefits, increased hospital treatments by 4 million patients and doubled the number of participants in the G.I. Bill program.[54] Upon signing the bill in the White House State Dining Room, the President told some assembled veterans that the bill "will allow you to get that education and that training so essential to get the jobs that you will later want."[55] The Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1972 became Public Law 92-540 on October 24, 1972.

Straining Congress and the public's patience, for the remaining two years of his presidency Nixon continued his pattern of working behind the scenes to cut veteran funding in many areas while lauding veterans in public. In March of 1973, in a "Statement About the Vietnam Veteran," Nixon proclaimed, "No group of American fighting men was ever called on to demonstrate their bravery, their endurance, or their love of country under more trying circumstances than those gallant Americans who served in Vietnam." Promising to "honor them," he went on to claim that no other generation of veterans had ever enjoyed such a wide range of government benefits. He then called on all employers to look favorably upon Vietnam veterans in their hiring

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[54] *Public Papers, Nixon,* "Radio Address on the Vietnam Veteran," October 22, 1972.

[55] *Public Papers, Richard Nixon,* "Remarks on Signing Veterans Benefits Legislation," October 24, 1972.

practices.[56] But he also used one of his favorite tactics to undermine one of the education programs he had signed into law the previous October. Upsetting the Constitutional balance, Nixon regularly impounded money appropriated by Congress for federal programs, effectively killing them. He did this on over 100 occasions, most notably for the Clean Water Act of 1972.[57] He refused to release 25 million dollars for the Veterans' Cost of Instruction Program, authorized under the 1972 G.I. Bill, designed to give money to institutions that encouraged veteran enrollment. It took court proceedings brought by the National Association of Collegiate Veterans to release the money in May of 1973. NACV President called it "pathetic that the Vietnam veteran must seek court action to gain the same benefits afforded veterans of past wars through congressional action."[58]

Meanwhile, Donald Johnson stubbornly supported the administration line, even as the public and political pressure on him increased. In March, he defended the hospital cutbacks in front of a House Appropriations subcommittee. In April, he wrote a stinging reply to a *New York Times* editorial that had accused Nixon of using "selective statistics" and had attacked education benefits as "pitifully short."[59] Johnson asserted "A compassionate concern for these young veterans has long had top priority in Administration considerations." After citing the numerous measures signed by Nixon to assist veterans, he claimed that Vietnam veterans could claim "nearly three times the

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[56] *Public Papers, Richard Nixon,* "Statement on the Vietnam Veteran," March 24, 1973.

[57] James L. Sundquist, *The Decline and Resurgence of Congress* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1981), 203.

[58] Quoted in the *Washington Post*, May 23, 7.

[59] "Age of the Viet Vets," *New York Times*, March 28, 1973, 46.

World War II allowance and gives most veterans more monetary assistance than after World War II, even allowing for inflation and increased school costs."[60]

Johnson's claims contradicted many of the studies undertaken on the G.I. Bill, and they revealed that there was a lot of confusion, misinformation, and hyperbole in the public debate over the G.I. Bill. Congressional leaders such as Teague and Yarborough had offered differing views of the success of the program than Johnson in their debates over funding levels on the Hill. The press continued to paint an even more damning picture of the program. A March 1973 editorial in the *Washington Post* claimed "The Viet vets have found that their GI bill dollars buy only one-fourth the education that their fathers got for the same money after World War II."[61] In light of such wildly contradictory claims, Congress sought further quantification of the effectiveness of the program.

Even though the two major G.I. Bill increases in 1970 and 1972 went a long way to alleviating the veteran's burden, they did not extinguish the overall criticisms against the program that persisted in the press. The backslapping speeches emanating from the White House and from some on the floors of both Houses indicated that the government was quite content with the efforts they had made thus far for the Vietnam veterans. But the criticism in the press over education benefits continued unabated throughout the early 1970s. Largely because of the policies and attitude of the administration and the VA, many veterans continued to feel that the government could do a lot more to aid their return home. Congress, therefore, included a proviso on the 1972 G.I. Bill that directed

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[60] Letter to the *New York Times*, April 14, 1973, 32.
[61] *Washington Post*, March 10, 1973, D31.

the Administrator of Veteran Affairs to commission an independent study to analyze the effectiveness of the program. The study aimed to provide a comparison of the post-Korea conflict G.I. Bills "with similar programs of educational assistance that were available to veterans of World War II and of the Korean conflict."[62] The Education Testing Service of New Jersey won the contract to conduct the study on May 25, 1973. On August 30, they submitted their results, but a VA advisory committee rejected it for not fulfilling the requirements. The revised report arrived on September 8.

The ETS report offered a thorough analysis of the post-Korean conflict benefits. The report noted that veteran participation under the 1966 G.I. Bill, and subsequent raises, surpassed Korean Conflict levels and would soon surpass World War II levels. However, the report suggested that usage levels were an imperfect indicator of success because no statistics existed in the VA or in other agencies that revealed how many veterans completed their courses. The VA had only collected data relevant to the administration of the program and did not keep track of drop out rates. No one knew if Vietnam veterans were using the G.I. Bill as a temporary cash boost without ever completing their course of study. A further problem in using participation rates was that they did not reveal how the veteran had fared relative to their non-veteran peers. Therefore, there was little indication of whether Vietnam era veterans had received benefits that compensated them fully for time lost from civilian life, one of the main goals of the G.I. Bills. The report also confirmed that black and disadvantaged veterans

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[62] *Final Report on Educational Assistance to Veterans: A Comparative Study of Three G.I. Bills, Submitted to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs United States Senate* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), III, refered to hereafter as the *ETS Report.*

were less likely to use their benefits for higher education, even though no other generation of veterans had had so many programs aimed at helping these groups. Federal efforts to assist these groups, the report concluded, needed expanding. No comparable data existed on disadvantaged veterans of the World War II era.

Perhaps the most significant issue addressed in the report, the one that had been at the heart of the debates since 1966, was the adequacy of funding levels. Here the report suggested, "the average Vietnam veteran attending a 4-year public or a 2-year public institution has educational benefits slightly higher than his World War II counterpart when adjustments for changes in the Consumer Price Index are made."[63] But the report raised several variables that affected the "real" worth of the benefits to the veteran. When one factored in raises in tuition, for example, or the fact that colleges did not make low cost housing available for Vietnam era veterans as many did for World War II veterans, the Vietnam veteran's "'real' ability to purchase postsecondary education has diminished with respect to his World War II counterpart."[64] Based on an average budget of a veteran's annual expenses, including all living, medical, education costs etc., the average single veteran needed an additional 628 dollars a year or roughly fifty-two dollars a month on which to live comfortably. The present levels, suggested the report, covered only 68.2 percent of the average single veteran's annual expenses. The average married veteran required an additional 1,644 dollars a year to cover all of their expenses. The 1973 benefits provided for only 50 percent of their needs.[65] There were, of course, variables from this average. A veteran attending a lower cost public education fared

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[63] Ibid., 30-31.
[64] Ibid., 33.
[65] Ibid., 50.

much better than one attending a public school. Moreover, the report confirmed that the differing costs of education in different states made a considerable impact on how far a veteran's money went. Ultimately, the report revealed that variations such as geography, class, and marital status made the kinds of negative generalizations about the program heard in Washington and in the press difficult to quantify. Many veterans *could* live reasonably on their benefits, but many more could use some additional aid.

If, as the VA claimed, the G.I. Bill was designed to *assist* a veteran achieve their education goals, then the G.I. Bill did provide a massive injection of funds and covered the majority of the veteran's costs. The VA expected the veteran to contribute something, either from their own savings, from employment, or in the case of married veterans, their spouse's employment. Indeed, the report noted that when one added a spouse's income to the basic benefits a married veteran with no dependents had enough to cover all of their expenses. In addition, the veterans could still claim other federal benefits such as BEOGs, National Defense Student Loans, or federally insured student loans (the report found that veterans had not made use of these other resources in significant numbers). If, however, the goal of the G.I. Bill was to cover *all* of a veteran's costs, the report revealed that there still existed shortcomings.

The ETS report gained mixed responses from those parties most affected by its findings. The media and the veteran community jumped on the report's conclusions as further evidence for their familiar refrain that the government and the VA were ignoring the veterans' needs. The *Washington Post* called for "A Fair Shake for Vietnam

Veterans"[66] In its monthly newsletter, the NACV informed its readers on the front page that, "Educational Testing Service Reports Vietnam Veterans Get Less Aid."[67] Predictably, the VA took issue with some of the report's more negative assessments of the program. In testimony before the Veterans Subcommittee on Education and Training, Odell Vaughan, chief benefits director at the VA, focused on the positive aspects of the report and maintained, "the majority of Vietnam era veterans are better off today."[68] Further, he suggested, "no general restructuring of the educational program seems necessary or advisable, especially with reference to the present benefit system."[69] Donald Johnson criticized the report for its methodology and its conclusions. Moreover, he suggested that most of the variables raised in the report that stretched the veterans' resources lay beyond the scope of the VA's mandate. He believed the VA should not, for example, fully compensate veterans wanting to attend higher cost schools or wanting to start a family. Johnson thought that the government was doing enough by paying more on average per head in adjusted dollars than it had done for the World War II veteran. This was not an unreasonable position to take, but it offered little comfort to those veterans who suffered because of their own geographical or familial status and wanted desperately to return to school. Johnson believed the report demonstrated that the Vietnam veteran "does have availability to educational assistance benefits . . . that are

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[66] *Washington Post*, October 22, 1973, 28.
[67] *NACV Newsletter*, September 1973, 1.
[68] Quoted in the *New York Times*, September 26, 1973, 21.
[69] Quoted in the *Washington Post*, October 25, 1973, 44.

comparable to those extended to veterans of World War II and the Korean conflict."[70] The VA refused to endorse any further benefit increases in the wake of the report.

Although it confirmed many of the previous observations made in private reports on the G.I. Bill, the ETS report was the largest federal attempt to quantify the effectiveness of the program and had a considerable impact on Capitol Hill. Bolstered by the new evidence contained in the report, Congress moved forward apace with new proposals to increase the veteran's monthly allowance. At the end of October, the House Veterans Affairs Committee considered a new proposal to give veterans a 13.6 percent increase, raising the monthly allowance from 220 dollars to 250 dollars. The proposal also sought to tie veterans' benefits to the Consumer Price Index. Significantly, the proposal also sought to increase the length of time a veteran could claim his or her benefits from eight years to ten years. This would allow veterans who had faced problems on coming home to have additional time to readjust before returning to higher education. In the Senate, Vance Hartke introduced a bill that would provide a 23 percent increase in benefits and provide up to 2,000 dollars in low interest loans for veterans in higher cost schools. Bob Dole, George McGovern, Charles Mathias Jr., and Daniel Inouye introduced a bill that provided a 13.6 percent increase but also paid all tuition costs above 400 dollars annually up to a maximum of 600 dollars. Nixon began to apply pressure as soon as Congress began to move. He suggested that veterans should receive no more than an 8 percent increase and threatened to veto a more costly measure.

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[70] Donald E. Johnson Letter of Transmittal to Spiro T. Agnew, September 18, 1973, reprinted in *ETS Report*, XI.

The House did not vote on their bill until February of 1974. Their final measure, H.R.12628, promised veterans a far from generous 13.6 percent increase in their monthly allowance. William Jennings Bryan Dorn, new Chair of the Veterans affairs committee denounced Nixon's calls for a mere 8 percent increase and called the House proposal "fully justified in view of the very significant increase in living costs and school expenses."[71] Every member who rose in the debate over H.R.12628 accepted the need for a benefits increase, but most raised concerns that the bill did not go far enough. John P. Hammerschmidt (R-AR) noted that the Consumer Price Index would rise to an estimated 13.2 percent by May, meaning that the proposed 13.6 percent increase would barely keep pace with the cost of living. Margaret Heckler (R-MA), one of the architects of the bill, added that food prices would rise by 16 percent in 1974 and called the increase "hardly generous—it is merely adequate."[72] Silvio Conte (R-MA) called for a bill that would pay 80 percent of a veteran's tuition costs. He conceded, "I intend to vote for the veterans educational benefits package . . . even though it falls somewhat short of the mark."[73] Teague, of course, saw no such problems with the bill. Referring to a more costly measure introduced in the Senate, he protested, "I am distressed . . . that the public is being subjected to the steady barrage of propaganda calculated to support a bill which has been introduced in the Senate." Teague also resurrected the notion of the privileged veteran when he added, "After the passage of this bill, the position of the Vietnam veterans will be distinctly preferential."[74] Once again, when the bill went to vote, it

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[71] *Congressional Record-House*, February 19, 1974, 3242.
[72] Ibid., 3247.
[73] Ibid., 3249.
[74] Ibid, 3261.

received unanimous backing. Despite the misgivings of many over the shortcomings of the bill, most considered any increase better than none. The final vote was a crushing 382-0.

H.R.12628 did retain the provision to raise the amount of time a veteran could claim their benefits from eight years to ten. Previous G.I. Bills had an eight-year limitation, but after World War II and Korea, veterans received generous benefits immediately. Vietnam era veterans did not enter the program in high numbers early on because of the low benefits offered under the 1966 bill. Only after the introduction of substantial increases did the majority of Vietnam era veterans begin to claim their benefits. Many who entered school in 1970 or 1972 would have run out of eligibility in 1974 under the existing bill. In the debates over H.R.12628, many politicians revealed they had received floods of letters from concerned veterans as their eligibility was about to expire. A two-year extension would offer the veteran the opportunity to complete their degree and would have particular significance for one group of veterans.

Females accounted made up only 2.3 percent of veterans of the Vietnam era.[75] Just over 20,000 served in the Southeast Asia Theater out of a military force of over 3 million mostly in nursing and administrative roles. Female veterans could claim the same benefits as their male counterparts, but tended to use their benefits much later after discharge from service, sometimes seven or eight years later. According to one VA report, 20.1 percent of male veterans were still in school seven years after service

[75] Veterans Administration Report, *Women Veterans: Use of Education Benefits Under the G.I. Bill* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981), 2.

compared with 40.1 percent of female veterans.[76] One major reason for this delay is that many left the service because of pregnancy or to start a family. In the 1960s and 1970s this process still meant the female veteran had to take several years out of her life to raise children.[77] Many, therefore, found it difficult to complete a four-year college course within the allotted eight-year window to claim benefits. The two-year extension would allow more female veterans an opportunity to complete their degree before their eligibility expired.

The Senate bill contained a similar two-year extension as the House bill, but also went much further in what it offered veterans. The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee reported out their bill, S.2784, on May 22. The Senate bill retained the central features of Hartke's earlier proposal by offering an 18 percent increase in benefits and the option of 2,000 dollars in loans. In addition to the two-year extension, a veteran could also receive forty-five months of benefits instead of thirty-six. No previous G.I. Bill had offered veterans as long to claim their benefits. As had the House bill, the Senate bill liberalized vocational training benefits for disabled veterans. The Senate bill also contained many other measures to liberalize the veteran's entitlements including offering greater assistance for tutorial programs and significantly raising the amount a veteran could earn in work-study programs.

The most contentious element of the Senate bill was a proposal to pay 80 percent of a veterans' tuition, up to 1,000 dollars per year once a veteran had paid an initial 100

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[76] Ibid., 7.

[77] This delay was also true for previous generations of female veterans according to June Willenz's study *Women Veterans: America's Forgotten Heroes* (New York: Continuum, 1983).

dollars. Unlike the World War II G.I. Bill, the tuition payment would go directly to the veteran. This change aimed to reduce the possibility of schools abusing the system by raising tuition costs as had happened under the first G.I. Bill. The direct tuition proposal was always going to be a tough sell in the House. Since the early 1950s, Teague led vehement opposition to such proposals following the abuses he discovered in his investigation on the 1944 G.I. Bill. By 1974, Teague had stepped down as head of the Veterans Affairs Committee in the House, but he remained a dominant figure on proceedings.

The veteran establishment offered widespread support for the Senate bill. Robert Eaton, National Commander of the American Legion expressed his hopes to Hartke that "S.2784 will be passed by the Senate without amendment and that the House will agree to its provisions at the earliest possible moment."[78] The Veterans of Foreign Wars made it a priority in 1974 to support "the enactment into law of comparable readjustment assistance for Vietnam veterans, as was provided for veterans of previous wars." Francis W. Stover, the VFW's Director of National Legislative Service informed Hartke "the prompt approval of S.2784 by the full Senate will be deeply appreciated by the more than 1.8 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars."[79] The Disabled American Veterans offered Hartke their "heartfelt thanks and appreciation" for the bill, while the American Veterans Committee noted that "the benefits of this important bill to the Vietnam-era

[78] Letter to Vance Hartke from Robert E. L. Eaton, reprinted in the *Congressional Record-Senate*, June 19, 1974, 20020.

[79] Letter to Vance Hartke from Francis W. Stover, reprinted in ibid, 20020-20021.

veterans, to education and to society itself, far outweigh possible abuses."[80] The NACV's Timothy Craig informed Hartke "The NACV believes that you and the members of the Committee have performed [an] excellent service to Vietnam Era veterans in formulating the bill which you have reported to the Senate."[81]

The Senate bill clearly went further than any previous measure to offer Vietnam veterans the kinds of generous benefits offered veterans of previous wars. Hartke claimed "In many ways this bill exceeds the measure under which many of us in Congress went to school after World War II."[82] Alan Cranston added, "I believe that finally . . . we will have provided a true measure of comparability of GI bill educational assistance for Vietnam-era veterans with the level of benefits provided after World War II and the Korean conflict."[83] Even the press responded favorably to the Senate bill. The *Washington Post* described the measure as "generous and fair."[84] But whether the House would accept such a generous bill remained in doubt. It took a long and arduous summer of negotiation before House and Senate conferees reached an agreement.

While Congress moved slowly toward an accord, 1974 was hardly turning into a banner year for Richard Nixon. While his political career was unraveling amid the Watergate allegations, his erratic record on veterans failed to improve. In public, he took his praise of Vietnam veterans to new heights. On January 28, he sent a "Special Message to the Congress Proposing Veterans Legislation" in which he reiterated his call

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[80] Letters to Vance Hartke from Charles L. Huber DAV National Director of Legislation, and from Arthur S. Freeman, AVC National Chairman reprinted in ibid, 20021-20022.

[81] Letter to Vance Hartke from Timothy L Craig, reprinted in ibid, 20021.

[82] *Congressional Record-Senate*, June 19, 1974, 20078.

[83] Ibid., 20057.

[84] *Washington Post*, June 28, 1974, 30.

for an 8 percent raise in education benefits "to keep pace with inflation" as well as increased funding in healthcare and pensions. He claimed that his administration had "done our best" to assist Vietnam veteran and "We owe these men and women our best effort in providing them with the benefits that their service has earned them."[85] Two days later in his State of the Union Address he reiterated, "We must also be concerned for those veterans and veterans' families who remain in need." On February 26, as he signed legislation proclaiming March 29 "Vietnam Veterans Day," he pledged, "we do owe a great debt of honor to those who served."[86] On the day itself, he commented, "We can be thankful that America produced such men, and we can be thankful that in the future these men, their courage, their continued service, will make it possible for us to achieve the goal that all Americans are dedicated to, peace for ourselves and for all mankind."[87]

Such rhetoric was cheap. Even if Nixon was sincere in his support of the veteran, he was not concerned enough to open the government's coffers much further. Four senators, McGovern, Inouye, Dole, and Mathias called a press conference on Vietnam Veterans Day at which they described the celebration "an empty gesture without action to fulfill the nation's debt to Vietnam-era veterans."[88] The bills circulating in Congress to increase education benefits represented the government's best chance at fulfilling that

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[85] *Public Papers, Nixon*, "Special Message to the Congress Proposing Veterans Legislation," January 28, 1974. Nixon also called for Veterans' Day to be retuned to November 11 having been moved to the fourth Monday in October in 1968.

[86] Ibid., "Remarks on Signing a Proclamation Honoring Vietnam Veterans," February 26, 1974.

[87] Ibid., "Remarks at Ceremonies Commemorating Vietnam Veterans Day," March 29, 1974.

[88] Quoted in the *New York Times*, March 29, 1974, 11.

debt. But in the final months of his administration, Nixon and his staffers worked hard to ensure the debt would not be paid in full.

A White House memo laid out the administration's objections to the Senate bill. The memo claimed that the Senate measure "Subverts the purpose of the GI Bill program" by encouraging those who might have only a casual interest in higher education and are "primarily interested in augmenting their own income without working." The memo suggested that the costs of the bill would also discriminate against veterans attending lower cost public schools by diverting VA funds to veterans wanting to attend more expensive schools. Fears of tuition abuse also fuelled the administration's opposition. The final objection was that the Senate bill "Balloons GI Bill costs unnecessarily" by "converting a cost-sharing program to an income-attractive program."[89] Nixon hoped to enlist Teague in the fight against the Senate bill and wrote him to reiterate the main White House objections. Teague seemed more than willing to comply. He informed White House staffers that he was attempting to bypass Hartke's more expensive bill by taking one of the different less expensive Senate bills, attaching the House version and returning it to the Senate. But Teague warned that—in the words of one administration aide—"Hartke is completely berserk on this one" and he asked the White House for assistance "on the Senate side to trim the monster back."[90] Nixon's aides then attempted to pressure Senate Veterans Affairs Committee members Strom

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[89] Attachment to Memo for Bill Timmons from Max Friedersdorf, May 3, 1974. Box 14, Folder "Veterans," O'Donnell and Jenckes Files, 1974-1976, Subject file: Veterans, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

[90] Memo for Bill Timmons from Max Friedersdorf, May 3, 1974, Folder "Veterans," Box 14, O'Donnell and Jenckes Files, 1974-1976, Subject file: Veterans, Ford Library.

Thurmond and Cliff Hansen to reduce the costs of the bill in conference. The main feature of the Senate bill that the White House wanted removed was the proposal for tuition payments. Nixon aide Bill Timmons described this feature as an "obnoxious provision."[91]

At the end of July, Nixon offered a further threat that he might veto any measure approaching the costs of the Senate bill. On July 30, he wrote Hartke to attack the Senate bill, which he described as "inflationary and unnecessary."[92] Again, he reiterated the same litany of opposition to the bill he had outlined to Teague. The *Washington Post* described Nixon's letter as a strong suggestion that he might veto the bill. But Nixon had offered similar opposition to education increases throughout his presidency so there was certainly no guarantee that he would veto the bill. Ultimately, the decision was not his to make. By the end of the summer, the Watergate investigations swept the Nixon administration into the dustbin of history. One of the most significant bills in the history of the G.I. Bill remained in conference as Nixon left the White House. Potentially, the bill could correct the problems of the existing program and could prove pivotal to the long-term success of the Vietnam era G.I. Bills. Nixon's successor, Gerald R. Ford, would be the one to face Congress and the veterans in a tumultuous fall in Washington.

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[91] Memo for Tom Korologos from William E. Timmons, July 24, 1974, Folder "Veterans," Box 14, O'Donnell and Jenckes Files, 1974-1976, Subject file: Veterans, Ford Library.

[92] *Washington Post*, August 2, 1974, 12.

Chapter 5

UNWILLING "SOLDIERS IN THE WAR AGAINST BRUTAL INLFATION": CONGRESS, THE VETERANS, AND THE FIGHT WITH GERALD R. FORD OVER THE 1974 G.I. BILL

> It is not my view . . . that the men that dodged the bullets in Vietnam should be the first ones to bite the bullet back home.
>
> Senator Strom Thurmond

> We went, some willingly, the rest regretfully, right or wrong we went. We watched our brothers die or to be maimed for what? . . . We believe the time is now to heal our Countries [sic] awful wound of Vietnam but first we ask that the MEN who fought and served their country be taken care of first.
>
> Joint statement by three Pennsylvania college veterans' associations

> We are all soldiers in the war against brutal inflation . . . I will not hesitate to veto any legislation to try and control inflationary excesses.
>
> President Gerald R. Ford

Just ten days after being sworn in as president, Gerald R. Ford spoke at the annual convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Chicago. His speech contained the usual politically expedient platitudes towards veterans as he pledged, "As a veteran, I want good relations with all veterans. We all proudly wore the same Nation's uniform and patriotically saluted the same flag. During my administration, the door of my office will be open to veterans just as it was in all of my 25 years as a member of congress."[1] Ford had served as naval gunnery officer and assistant navigator on board the *U.S.S. Monterey* in the Pacific during World War II, so he was no doubt sincere when he promised, "If we can send men thousands and thousands of miles from home to fight in the rice paddies,

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[1] *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Gerald R. Ford*, "Remarks to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Annual Convention, Chicago, Illinois," August 19, 1974.

certainly we can send them back to school and better jobs at home."[2] But the new President's speech also contained ominous signs for veterans hoping for some respite from their financial struggles during the coming school year. Ford revealed a side to his political outlook that appeared to contradict his professed affiliation with the plight of veterans. Alluding to the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 still tied up in Congress, Ford commented, "your Government, of necessity, has to be constrained by other considerations as well. We are all soldiers in the war against brutal inflation . . . I will not hesitate to veto any legislation to try and control inflationary excesses."[3]

During his brief term as president, Ford continued Nixon's policies of fiscal conservatism. Three days after taking office, Ford identified inflation as "public enemy number one." As a former member of the House Appropriations Committee, Ford brought a keen interest and knowledge of economics to the presidency.[4] From day one, he met with his economic advisors and launched a series of "Inflation Summits" throughout the fall to discuss ways of tackling the inflation problem.[5] Ford also launched a voluntary "Whip Inflation Now" campaign whereby concerned citizens could express their support for beating inflation by writing to the White House and requesting "WIN" pins. Over 100,000 people signed up, but the new program represented little more than a symbolic gesture and attracted mild ridicule from some. Ford's more serious proscription

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[2] Ibid., 26.

[3] Ibid.

[4] John Robert Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 68.

[5] Herbert Stein, *Presidential Economics: The Making of Economic Policy From Roosevelt to Reagan and Beyond* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1984), 212.

for tackling inflation put him immediately in conflict with the Democrat controlled Congress. Ford believed that the decades of wide-ranging government spending on social programs, begun under the New Deal and given renewed impetus under the Great Society, had led to America's economic woes. In his memoirs, Ford outlined his vision on the ideal role for government when he advocated, "less government intervention in the affairs of citizens and corporations, greater reliance on individual initiative and a free market economy, and increased local responsibility for overcoming adversities."[6]

Much to Ford's chagrin, more often than not, Congress proved reluctant to share in his vision of economic retrenchment. Throughout his presidency, Ford found himself at odds with Congress over financial matters. During his first few months, Ford vetoed a Railroad Retirement Act that he claimed would cost over seven billion dollars over twenty-five years, only to have his veto overridden by Congress. Congress also refused his request to defer a federal pay raise for three months. In total Ford vetoed sixty-six bills; Congress sustained fifty-four of his vetoes. In part, congressional opposition was philosophical. Steeped in the activist government traditions of the New Deal and Great Society, many congressional Democrats saw federal investment in social programs as a way to ease unemployment and inflation concerns. On a more mercenary note, 1974 was also an election year for Congress, so the kinds of cuts in popular programs envisioned by Ford could imperil the reelection prospects of some if they compromised the interests of their constituents.

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[6] Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979), 263.

As a part of his economic retrenchment, Ford announced that he hoped to slash around five billion dollars from the budget Richard Nixon had already announced for the fiscal year 1975.[7] As it stood, the legislation then circulating on Capitol Hill to increase veterans' education benefits jeopardized the revised budget target. With the 1974 fall semester looming, millions of veterans waited expectantly to see whether Ford's dedication to helping veterans was stronger than his dedication to whip inflation. The signs were not good.

One possible crumb of comfort for veterans was that VA had a new and potentially more accommodating leader during the political battles over veterans' funding that lay ahead. Criticism of Donald Johnson and the VA from the press the public and in Congress escalated throughout 1973 and early into 1974 forcing him to retire in the spring of 1974. Under his leadership, the VA reached its nadir in terms of public opinion. Summing up in the *Washington Post*, Tim O'Brien wrote that Johnson's tenure as head of the VA had been characterized by:

> complaints of late benefit payment to thousands of veterans, politicization of the agency, budget cutting at the expense of VA hospitals and education programs, the misuse of taxpayers' dollars for junkets and conferences outside Washington, a lack of sophistication for generating figures on the number of veterans who actually complete their schooling under the GI bill, insensitivity to the problems of Vietnam-era veterans, and an atmosphere of parochialism and rigidity in the agency.[8]

Given such a barrage of charges, most Vietnam era veterans welcomed *any* change in the VA leadership.

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[7] Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 154-155.

[8] Tim O'Brien, "Ford Names Roudebush To Head VA," *Washington Post*, August 19, 1974, 1.

To replace Johnson, Ford chose former Indiana congressman Richard L. Roudebush.[9] Roudebush certainly seemed to possess the credentials to make an effective VA Administrator. He had fought in the North African and Italian campaigns of World War II and immediately following service worked in the Indianapolis Regional Office of the Veterans Administration. In 1957, he served as Commander in Chief of the VFW. During his five terms in the House from 1961 to 1971 Roudebush remained a keen veterans advocate and served as ranking Republican on the House Veterans Affairs Committee. From January 1971 through January 1974, he served as a Deputy Administrator in the VA, after which he served as Donald Johnson's Assistant Deputy, the second highest position within the VA. Although some veterans groups feared that Roudebush might be just "another good ole boy," most welcomed his appointment.[10] Ray Soden, head of the VFW, expressed confidence that Roudebush "provides all that is necessary to head the VA." NACV President, Timothy L. Craig, expressed his hopes that Roudebush "will demonstrate a solid commitment to reversing many VA policies toward Vietnam-era veterans that have been operative for the past five years."[11] But before either Ford or Roudebush had the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to veterans, Congress first had to agree on an appropriate package of benefits to present to them for consideration. This proved no easy task, but by mid-August, Senate and House conferees had reached a compromise agreement over their respective bills.

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[9] Richard Nixon had previously indicated his intent to nominate Roudebush to head the VA after a protracted search for Donald Johnson's successor. Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, a popular choice among veterans, had been offered the post but declined.

[10] The view of Forrest Lindley of the Vietnam Veterans Center, as quoted in the *Washington Post*, July 25, 1974, 2.

[11] Quoted in ibid.

Conferees struck the Senate's desire for direct tuition assistance from the bill, but to compensate agreed upon a 23 percent increase in the veteran's benefits, raising the monthly allowance for a single veteran to 270 dollars, up from 220 dollars. A married veteran would receive 321 dollars, an increase of sixty dollars a month. The compromise plan would also allow eligible veterans to claim up to 1000 dollars in loans to offset tuition discrepancies. The VA would administer the loans from the seven billion dollars in veterans' life insurance premiums held in the federal National Service Life Insurance Trust Fund. A veteran would have up to ten years to repay the loan at an interest rate set by the VA. With the deadlines for fall enrollments looming, Dorn noted that it was, "important that the Congress act immediately so that veterans know what to expect in making their plans for the fall term."[12] It appeared as though an accord had been achieved in Congress. Attempting to allay fears of the costs of the program and, perhaps, preempting the anticipated challenge from Ford, Hartke noted, "The measure we have agreed upon today is not inexpensive . . . But past G.I. Bill expenditures have been repaid many times over in the higher taxes of those whose education gave them greater earning power. It's the best kind of investment we can make in people and our economy."[13] Hartke hoped that the bill would "help us keep faith with the Vietnam veterans who served when it was not always easy to serve."[14]

If passed, the bill would represent one of the largest ever increases in veterans' education benefits. The provisions for loan payments to offset tuition discrepancies

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[12] Committee on Veteran Affairs Release, Folder 2, Box 59, John N. "Happy" Camp Papers, Carl Albert Center.

[13] Quoted in the *New York Times*, August 14, 1974, 16.

[14] Quoted in the *Washington Post*, August 14, 1974, 15.

addressed one of the biggest criticism leveled against the previous Vietnam era G.I. Bills. Even under the new bill, the Vietnam era veteran's benefits remained less liberal than those offered the World War II veteran in terms of tuition payments, but the new option of low interest loans did at least give the veteran a new source of funding to help abate their financial troubles. The extension of benefits to forty-five months, up from thirty-six, gave the Vietnam era veteran a greater length of time to complete their study than any previous generation of veterans had enjoyed. The increase in the monthly allowance, while barely outstripping the rising costs of education, could convince many to return to school who might have previously been dissuaded by the many stories of veteran hardship and poverty emanating from campuses over the previous few years.

One issue had already been resolved. In July, the House and Senate passed a separate act giving veterans their two-year extension. Congress had separated this provision so that veterans would know if they were eligible to receive benefits in the forthcoming school year. This act gave veterans ten years to claim their benefits, longer than any previous generation of veterans had received.

Cautious optimism characterized the reaction from veteran community to the remaining bill on Capitol Hill. The National Association of Concerned Veterans expressed disappointment over the omission of direct tuition assistance, but welcomed the overall increase in allowances.[15] Therefore, reasonably satisfied that Congress had, at last, done its part in the fight to increase education benefits, veterans' advocates steeled themselves for the next anticipated battle, getting the awaiting president to sign the bill into law. On August 21, the Senate passed the bill unanimously with a voice vote and

[15] Quoted in the *New York Times*, August 14, 1974, 16.

with very little debate. All that remained was for the House to follow suit. No one expected any surprises here. As one *New York Times* editorial noted, "Given the amount of patriotic speechmaking in Congress about Vietnam in particular and war veterans in general one might think that this measure would be about as controversial as Mother's day."[16]

The vote went to the House on August 22, the eve of a congressional recess. With a passing vote, the bill would have been sent to Ford for his consideration and millions of veterans would have a much clearer understanding of their financial future for the forthcoming school year. On August 21, Ford paid a visit to his "old friends" on the Hill and called for a spirit of unity between Congress and the White House when he stated, "Together we have a big job ahead, and I emphasize 'We' on the basis of togetherness."[17] The following day, the House embraced the President's desire for compromise in a way that few had predicted.

After House Speaker Carl Albert and Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman William Bryan Jennings Dorn introduced the vote on the veterans' benefits, Iowa representative Harold Royce Gross spoke up and stated, "Mr. Speaker, I raise a point of order against the conference report H.R. 12628. . . . The conference report violates clause 3 of rule XXVIII in that the conferees exceeded the scope of the conference."[18] Gross proclaimed the conference report invalid on the grounds that the agreed upon 23 percent benefit increase exceeded the 13.6 percent agreed in the House back in February and the 18.2 percent agreed in the Senate in June. This seldom-invoked technicality left Carl

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[16] *New York Times*, September 25, 1974, 39.
[17] *Congressional Record-House*, August 21, 1974, 29665.
[18] Ibid., 30050.

Albert with no choice but to sustain the point of order and declare the compromise bill null and void. Last minute political maneuverings by the Ford Administration led to Gross's actions. In a hastily arranged meeting at 6:00 a.m. on the morning of the vote, Republican leaders had crafted this strategy to kill the compromise bill, instantly wiping out months of negotiation. Gross was a World War I veteran who had served in Congress since 1949 but did not run in 1974. Thus, he could afford to take the politically risky move of thwarting the benefits package. His action drew immediate criticism from some in the House. New York Representative Lester Wolff protested, "What about these Vietnam veterans? If we bow to the White House, we are not meeting our responsibility to them. . . . Where are all those who so strongly supported this war now that these men have come home?[19]

The debate then took another turn when Dorn produced an alternative G.I. Bill for the House to vote on. His new bill offered only an 18 percent increase in benefits and completely removed both the loan provision and the nine-month extension for eligibility. Dorn had been one of the architects of the compromise bill but had apparently succumbed to pressure from the White House to reduce the costs of the benefits increase. On board the flight from the VFW convention in Chicago on August 19, Ford had informed Dorn that he would veto the compromise bill if the House passed as it stood.[20] Dorn then took the decision to yield to White House pressure so that veterans could at least have some sort of increase before the new school year began. On this point, many of his fellow representatives reluctantly agreed. Pennsylvania's John P. Murtha had a particular

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[19] Ibid., 30058.

[20] *Congressional Record-House*, August 22, 37875.

interest in the proceedings. Murtha had volunteered for service in Vietnam and served there in 1966 and 1967. He became the first Vietnam combat veteran elected to the House. He agreed with Dorn that "the overwhelming priority at this time is that we agree on a bill, and that we pass and the President sign it before September so the veteran knows what he can count on as another school year begins. This is not a perfect bill. But it is an acceptable bill. And it will help."[21] The measure passed the House by a vote of 388-0.

Almost immediately, many in Congress expressed their concern over the handling of the vote. One member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee thought that House members were voting on the conference report and claimed that he did not even know they were voting to kill certain measures of the compromise bill.[22] A letter to Ford signed by fifty-nine representatives later pointed out, "When voting on the conference report, some members were not aware that these provisions had been removed at the last minute. Others supported the [reduced] bill because it would offer some assistance, and it was the sense of the House to keep the bill alive."[23] Colorado representative Patricia Schroeder wrote an impassioned letter to Dorn, Carl Albert, and the other members of the Veterans Affairs Committee in which she stated:

> quite frankly, on August 22, Vietnam era veterans were shafted by the technical parliamentary move mounted by opponents – including some of our own House conferees – of the Conference report.
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> While the Conference Report was ruled out of order, a substitute measure was instantly produced by senior members of the Veterans Affairs Committee.

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[21] *Congressional Record-House*, August 22, 1974, 30060-30061.

[22] Don Edwards (D-CA), quoted in the *New York Times*, August 24, 1974, 9.

[23] Letter to Gerald Ford from 59 Congressmen, September 30, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

> Gone in the new version are the loan program, the nine-month eligibility extension from (36 months to 45 months), and the education and training allowance increases for many disabled veterans were reduced from 23 percent to 18 percent. The measure must now go back to the Senate for action. Thus, the outcome of the backroom maneuver by senior House members at the urging of the White House is to leave Vietnam era Veterans slowly, slowly twisting in the wind – to use a recently popular political phrase.[24]

Ford claimed to have played no direct part in the House decisions beyond raising concerns with members of the House and Senate over the "$780-some-million over and above the budget for this year" that the compromise bill would have added. But Ford clearly approved the new measure and hoped that when the bill went back into conference Congress would retain the "good provisions" of the revised House bill "because it was inflationary the way it was."[25]

Not surprisingly, a chorus of disapproving voices arose from all corners over the House's actions. In the Senate, Hartke charged that, "it is evident that this point of order was made with full knowledge and active participation of the House Leadership and the Administration. Had the House had the opportunity to vote on the full conference report I am confident that it would have overwhelmingly been approved."[26] A *New York Times* editorial asked a question which must have been in the minds of many at the time: "Why is it politically correct to treat Vietnam veterans in this shabby and inadequate manner?" Timothy Craig of the NACV stated, "Once again Vietnam veterans have been lied to. . . .

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[24] Letter to William Jennings Bryan Dorn from Patricia Schroeder (D-Col.), Carl Albert, and members of the Veterans Affairs Committee, September 17, 1974, Folder 1, Box 172 Carl Albert Legislative Files, Carl Albert Center.

[25] *Public Papers, Gerald Ford*, "President's News Conference," August 28, 1974.

[26] Quoted in the *National Association of Concerned Veterans Newsletter*, September 1974, 2. According to the *New York Times,* Hartke had also been pressured by Ford to reduce the costs of the benefits package following the compromise bill but had informed the President that the bill was, "just too far down the road." Quoted in the *New York Times*, August 24, 1974, 9.

The House conferees have gone back on their word by failing to approve the conference report they unanimously agreed to on Aug. 19."[27] Carl Albert received a host of letters from concerned veterans and on-campus veterans' counselors lamenting the actions of the House and urging corrective action. The Director of the Office of Veterans Affairs at Oklahoma City Southwestern College expressed his, "dismay and surprise at the failure of the House to approve the Conference Report" after personally witnessing "numerous veterans drop-out because they had to work overtime just to make ends meet."[28] Joseph L. McCarter, veterans' counselor at San Diego City College forwarded Albert a petition of veterans' names imploring the Speaker to, "act on their behalf . . . [and] for their and our sake, be generous, they deserve it."[29] Warren Johnson spent fifteen months in a support role for C-130 Hercules aircraft in Southeast Asia. He wrote Albert on September 5 to tell him that, "I and many other veterans look at the Senate version of the new GI benefits as a Godsend. It looks at the needs of the Vietnam veteran in a realistic manner."[30] Following Congress's recess, a September 30 voice vote in the Senate rejected the parsimonious House bill and so the G.I. Bill went back into conference. The veterans still waited.

Several more weeks of political bargaining followed before the House and Senate conferees could once more agree on a new version of H.R.12628. Negotiations survived an eleventh hour attempt by Ford to agree to a bill that limited the benefits increase to 20

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[27] Quoted in the *New York Times*, August 24, 1974, 9.

[28] Letter to Carl Albert from Phillip L. Shorter, September 27, 1974, Folder 1, Box 172, Carl Albert Legislative Files. Carl Albert Center.

[29] Letter to Carl Albert from Joseph L. McCarter, September 13, 1974, Folder 1, Box 172, Carl Albert Legislative Files, Carl Albert Center.

[30] Letter to Carl Albert from Warren A. Johnson, September 5, 1974, Folder 1, Box 172, Carl Albert Legislative Files, Carl Albert Center.

percent while removing the loan provision and allowing veterans up to forty-five months to claim benefits. Ford also wanted payment of any benefit increases to be delayed until January 1, 1975. But the conferees risked a potential presidential veto by drafting a new bill that, in many respects, resembled the original compromise agreed to August 19 and rejected by the House. The new bill retained the 23 percent increase in the veteran's allowance. The bill also cemented the increase in veterans' eligibility to a forty-five month period but with the added proviso that the extra time must be used only to complete undergraduate work. The provision for loans to veterans remained in the new bill but the conferees reduced the maximum amount allowed from 1,000 to 600 dollars per year and stipulated that the veteran must first attempt to secure loans through generally available federal student loan programs. If passed, the benefit increases would be retroactive to September 1. Dorn commented that in conference, "We had no difficulty agreeing on most major points."[31] But Senator James McClure, indicated in a letter to White House Aide Bill Timmons that the new conference bill might have resulted from some politicking from the Democrats. Specifically he charged that Olin Teague had "suddenly changed completely" from his opposition to tuition assistance and "not only conceded to the Senate point of view but insisted that we go beyond what had been discussed in previous conferences." According to McClure, Teague seemed to be "following Democrat strategy to force the President to veto this bill."[32] The implication

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[31] *Congressional Record-House*, October 10, 1974, 35151.

[32] Letter to William Timmons from James A. McClure, October 11, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

here is that the Democrats wanted to hand Ford a political time bomb by giving him a bill that he would be reluctant to sign, thus casting him as a foe of veterans.

The second conference report went to the House and Senate on October 7 with the vote set to take place on October 10. Dorn began proceedings in the House by outlining the "conferees philosophy as to the fiscal impact of this legislation."[33] He agreed that the 18 or 20 percent increase proposed by the White House was consistent with increase in the cost of living, but that it ignored rising tuition costs in private and public schools. He also stressed that the loan provision was in no way designed as a handout and that veterans could expect "consequences" for default of payment. Henry Helstoski called the bill a "reasonable compromise," but Connecticut representative Ella Grasso described it as a "mixed blessing," and lamented, "I believe we should have done better."[34] This time, there were no background dealings to scupper the vote, and the measure sailed past the House by a vote of 388-0.

In the Senate, Jennings Randolph, standing in for the absent Vance Hartke, began the debates by noting that the compromise bill had shaved almost 46 percent off the cost of the original proposal passed in the Senate on June 19. He added, "The committee does not believe that we can compromise further on this crucial measure."[35] Alan Cranston spoke of the government's "moral obligation" to its veterans, and urged Ford to "put a stop to the waiting game veterans have been forced to play since late last spring by

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[33] *Congressional Record-House*, October 10, 1974, 35150.
[34] Ibid., 35151, 35154.
[35] *Congressional Record-Senate*, October 10, 1974, 35065.

signing this much needed bill into law."[36] The Senate then passed the bill with a unanimous vote.

Finally, after months of political wrangling, Congress could present Ford with a new G.I. Bill for his consideration. The Senate held on to the bill for several weeks to avoid a pocket veto, but on November 18, the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 arrived at the White House. Only Ford's anti-inflationary convictions stood between the Vietnam era veteran and their long-overdue benefits increase. On the same day the bill arrived at the White House, Ford sent an ominous message to Congress in which he stated, "while acknowledging the debt to those who served during the Vietnam era, I must insist on a fiscally responsible bill on behalf of all Americans."[37] With one political battle over, another one loomed.

The new G.I. Bill garnered almost universal support from Congress, veterans' organizations, public officials, and the public. Throughout the debates over veterans' education benefits from August to November, the White House received a flood of letters urging Ford to sign the bill into law. From the House, fifty-nine Congressmen and women signed a letter to Ford stating, "While we agree that government spending should be cut, we do not think it fair to further burden the men and women who served in our armed forces in recent years. . . . One of our national priorities even in battling inflation must be to compensate our country's veterans."[38] William Jennings Bryan Dorn told Ford that "The suggestions we discussed on our trip to Chicago generally have been

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[36] Ibid., 35067.

[37] *Congressional Record-House*, December 3, 1974, 37876.

[38] Letter to Gerald Ford from 59 Congressmen, September 30, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

incorporated," and warned him that "An overwhelming majority of the Congress feels that the bill agreed to by the House and Senate on October 10 is reasonable and is justified."[39] All members of the New York State Congressional Delegation called on Ford to accept the increases in benefits, time limits, and loan provisions cut from the House bill on August 22.[40] Margaret Heckler, one of many representatives to personally write to Ford urging his approval and suggested that the government "owe[s] these veterans the same benefits which we provided those who returned from previous wars."[41] John Murtha wrote Ford:

> As you probably know, I was in South Vietnam with the 1st Marines. Consequently, many of the young fellows who served in Vietnam come to me with their problems. . . . These young fellows who, in many cases, did not believe in the war served honorably under very adverse conditions. While Congress sat in their air-conditioned offices and debated the efforts and the righteousness of the war, they fought in the mud and jungles of Southeast Asia. . . . I believe it would be a real injustice to veto any legislation which is so important to the young men who fought for our country and are now trying to get started again.[42]

The Senate proved equally firm in its support of H.R.12628. Sixty-two senators from both ends of the political spectrum, including Bob Dole, George McGovern, Bob Packwood, Joseph Biden, Hubert Humphrey, Edward Kennedy, and Sam Nunn, wrote of

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[39] Telegram to Gerald Ford from William Jennings Bryan Dorn, October 12, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library, and letter to Gerald Ford from William Jennings Bryan Dorn, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs 10/23/74-12/31/74," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

[40] Letter to Gerald Ford signed by all members of the New York Congressional Delegation, September 16, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

[41] Letter to Gerald Ford from Margaret Heckler, October 11, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

[42] Letter to Gerald Ford from John P. Murtha, August 22, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

their deep concern "about the plight of Vietnam veterans" and sought Ford's "help in avoiding further delays in the enactment of an improved Vietnam-era veterans education bill." They noted, "Thousands of veterans have contacted us to express their frustration and anger over the delay which has held up enactment to date."[43] In a separate letter, Strom Thurmond joined with other members of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs to inform Ford, "We believe this country should be able to provide as comprehensive an education program for the Cold War and Vietnam Era veterans as it did for their fathers. H.R.12628 goes a long way to accomplishing this end."[44]

Pressure on Ford to sign the bill came from many other sectors of society. Predictably, veterans on campus were among the most vocal advocates of the new G.I. Bill. Although Ford had called on all Americans to be "soldiers in the war against brutal inflation," the Vietnam veteran had already had their war and, for most, the new call to arms was every bit as unwelcome as the first had been. Speaking on behalf of over 3,000 veterans enrolled at Grossmont College, California, the on-campus Veterans Affairs Director, let Ford know that he considered H.R.12628 "a good solid piece of legislation, and very supportive of the veterans at our campus and throughout the nation."[45] The President of California State University sent a letter along with the signatures of 700 veterans notifying the President that "This new G.I. Bill will help us keep faith with the

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[43] Letter to Gerald Ford signed by sixty-two Senators, October 10, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

[44] Letter to Gerald Ford from the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, October 10, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

[45] Letter to Gerald Ford from Ed Shenk, Veterans Affairs Director, Grossmont College, CA, August 11, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs 8/9/74-11/30/74," Box 1, WHCF, Veterans Administration-General, Ford Library.

veterans of the Vietnam era who served at a very difficult period in American history. It is a great step forward in providing the necessary financial assistance to veterans who are attempting to complete their educational goals."[46] Over 3,500 veterans and non-veterans from the University of New Orleans petitioned Ford to inform him, "The passage of these additional benefits is essential to the welfare and the continuing education of all veterans who have given so much to keep this country great and free."[47] The *New York Times* reported that veterans at the University of California had recruited students to donate blood "as a demonstration of their need for increased educational benefits."[48] From Pennsylvania, veterans' activists from three colleges reminded Ford, "We went, some willingly, the rest regretfully, right or wrong we went. We watched our brothers die or to be maimed for what? . . . We believe the time is now to heal our Countries [sic] awful wound of Vietnam but first we ask that the MEN who fought and served their country be taken care of first."[49]

In one of the more colorful expressions of support for the new bill, three veterans confronted Ford in what the Associated Press described as a "finger waving debate" at the University of Utah after he had just given a speech on campus. The three veterans, all members of the University of Utah Veterans Association demanded to know whether

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[46] Letter to Gerald Ford from Stanford Cazier, September 12, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs 8/9/74-11/30/74," Box 1, WHCF, Veterans Administration-General, Ford Library.

[47] Letter to Gerald Ford from Roger Piper, October 30, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs 8/9/74-11/30/74," Box 1, WHCF, Veterans Administration-General, Ford Library.

[48] *New York Times*, November 14, 1974, 61.

[49] Letter to Gerald Ford from Louis J. Tullio, October 17, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs 8/9/74-11/30/74," Box 1, WHCF, Veterans Administration-General, Ford Library.

Ford intended to approve the new bill. Ford informed them that he was "not in a position to say yes or not until it gets down to the White House." When pressed further for an opinion, Ford claimed that the bill would give Vietnam era veterans greater entitlements than any previous generation of veterans and that the bill still "had some problems that are to be analyzed." After being led away from the fray, Ford told a group of journalists on board Air Force One, "I hope they understand that his bill raises some legitimate questions. It involves substantial amounts of Federal dollars. I haven't made up my mind yet as to what to do about the bill."[50]

Ford also received telegrams from Malcolm Wilson, governor of New York to "respectfully urge" him to sign the bill to "help provide our Vietnam veterans with a greater opportunity to achieve their educational goals."[51] Brendan Byrne, Governor of New Jersey told Ford that "There can be no doubt that the increase in benefit payments, in addition to the other provisions of this legislation, is critical to veterans living in the New Jersey area."[52] Finally, the VFW's Ray Soden informed Ford, "The Veterans of Foreign Wars believes compassion dictates that those who have served honorably and have already made a sacrifice in he national interest by their service in the armed forces should not be compelled to make a second sacrifice in the battle of inflation."[53]

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[50] *New York Times*, November 3, 1974, 25.

[51] Telegram to Gerald Ford from Malcolm Wilson, October 15, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs 10/23/74-12/31/74," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

[52] Letter to Gerald Ford from Brendan T. Byrne November 22, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs 10/23/74-12/31/74," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

[53] Telegram to Gerald Ford from Ray Soden, August 21, 1974, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs 8/9/74-11/30/74," Box 1, WHCF, Veterans Administration-General, Ford Library.

Given such an outpouring of political and public support, Ford would have been left in no doubt as to the level of criticism he might expect if he chose H.R.12628 to make his stand in the fight against inflation. Before deciding on the most prudent course of action, Ford solicited advice from many different agencies and concerned parties within his administration. As director of the Office of Management and Budget, the recommendations of Roy L. Ash would have a considerable bearing on Ford's decision. Veterans' advocates had long criticized the disproportionate influence of the OMB in dictating policies of the VA under the Nixon Administration. Too often, they charged, the financial conservatism of the OMB had led the government to ride roughshod over the genuine financial concerns of veterans. Given his commitment to cutting costs, Ford would pay particular attention to Ash's views on the inflationary nature of H.R.12628.

Ash, solicited the views of several concerned federal agencies and departments on behalf of the President. On October 17, VA Administrator Richard Roudebush wrote Ash in some detail outlining the VA's position on the specific provisions of the bill. Noting that since the 1972 the cost of living had "increased approximately 19.5 percent," Roudebush considered the tuition increase to nearly 23 percent to be "within reasonable reach of those increases which the president has indicated are acceptable." He also consented to the loan program and the nine-month extension for receiving entitlements. Roudebush concluded that, "I am convinced that despite the large increase in cost engendered by the enrolled enactment, it represents the best compromise that can be

reached and, on balance, is realistic. . . . For the foregoing reasons, I recommend that the President approve H.R. 12628."[54]

Other agencies proved more equivocal in their responses to Ash. Peter J. Brennan, secretary of Labor outlined the Department of Labor's view, "that the maximum feasible efforts are needed to help returning veterans find a useful and productive place in the society which they have helped to defend," but ultimately deferred their recommendation to, "other agencies more directly concerned."[55] Similarly, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare despite expressing reservations over the loan programs, informed Ash that, "the bill contains many other features of direct and substantial impact on programs administered by the Veterans Administration. We therefore defer to that agency as to the desirability of the enactment of the bill."[56] Other agencies refusing to take a firm position on the bill included the Justice Department, Federal Trade Commission, and the U.S. Postal Service.[57]

Roy Ash made his recommendation to Ford on November 22. Ash outlined the arguments in favor of approval for Ford's consideration. These included an admission

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[54] Letter to Roy L. Ash from Richard Roudebush, October 17, 1974, Folder "H.R. 12628 Veterans Education Bill (1) 11/26/74," Box 14, Legislation Case Files, 1974-76, Ford Library. Roudebush approved the loan program only after the new bill provided for a "revolving fund established from appropriated funds" rather than the National Service Life Insurance trust fund. He also consented to the nine-month extension after the new bill specified that it could only be used for an undergraduate education and did not fund graduate studies.

[55] Letter to Roy L. Ash from Peter J. Brennan, October 23, 1974, Folder "H.R. 12628 Veterans Education Bill (1) 11/26/74," Box 14, Legislation Case Files, 1974-76, Ford Library.

[56] Letter to Roy L. Ash from the Acting Secretary for the Department of Health, October 17, 1974, Folder "H.R. 12628 Veterans Education Bill (1) 11/26/74," Box 14, Legislation Case Files, 1974-76, Ford Library.

[57] Memorandum for Gerald Ford from Roy L. Ash, November 22, 1974, Folder "Veterans Education Benefits," Box 11, William E. Timmons Files, Ford Library.

that the 23 percent increase was consistent with the rise in cost of living and that a more attractive G.I. Bill might aid the economy by reducing the unemployment rate among Vietnam veterans. But Ash countered that since the original act of 1944, the G.I. Bills, "were not intended to be an educational income security program," and that relatively high participation rates indicated that they had served their purpose adequately as a means of providing "readjustment assistance." Ash also noted that, the new bill would add an additional 502 million dollars to the 1975 budget. In the final analysis, Ash informed Ford that "Because these costs are clearly unacceptable, and because of the other unnecessary and undesirable provisions, . . . we recommend that you disapprove the bill and reaffirm your recommendation that the Congress enact a proposal providing a simple 18.2 percent rate increase effective January 1, 1975."[58]

Ash was not the only moneyman to express his disapproval of H.R.12628. Since July of 1974, Alan Greenspan had headed the Council of Economic Advisors.[59] Although their relationship had barely begun, Ford would later write of Greenspan, "Whenever I was under pressure to add funds to a program and he thought I might be influenced by the political aspects of the decision, he would caution me to hold the line. Usually, he won because he was right."[60] Greenspan shared Ford's beliefs that many of America's economic woes could be traced back to the growing influence of government in economic affairs since the 1930s.[61] Ford met with Greenspan several times during the

[58] Ibid.
[59] Greene, *Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, 69.
[60] Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 153.
[61] Sloan, "Economic Policymaking," 117.

final week of November to "discuss potential spending cuts."[62] On November 25, Greenspan outlined his position on the proposed veteran benefits increase when he wrote, "We are concerned with easing the transition to civilian life for members of the armed forces. However, we oppose the creation of public programs to provide long-term subsidies to nondisabled veterans, necessarily at the expense of non-veterans." Denouncing the new G.I. Bill as antithetical to the administration's "well-publicized policy of budget restraint," Greenspan declared it "in the public interest for the President to veto H.R. 12628."[63]

Ash and Greenspan reaffirmed Ford's fears of the inflationary nature of the bill. But in addition to the VA, Congress, veterans, and the public, several of Ford's advisors reminded him of the political dangers of such an action in the final days leading up to his decision. William J. Baroody Jr., Assistant to the President for Public Liaison, urged Ford's approval on the grounds that "sustaining a veto is impossible, there is no benefit to be gained by alienating a large number of Veterans organizations."[64] William Timmons, Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs recommended approval, again noting that Congress would likely override the veto. If Ford did veto, added Timmons, his veto

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[62] Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 220.

[63] Memorandum for Warren Hendriks from Alan Greenspan, November 25, 1974, Folder "H.R. 12628 Veterans Education Bill (1) 11/26/74," Box 14, Legislation Case Files, 1974-76, Ford Library.

[64] Memorandum for Gerald Ford from Kenneth Cole, November 25, 1974, Folder "H.R. 12628 Veterans Education Bill (1) 11/26/74," Box 14, Legislation Case Files, 1974-76, Ford Library.

message must challenge Congress to "practice what is [sic] preaches in campaign oration; it must join in making the tough decisions if we are to combat inflation."[65]

Ford could have been left in no doubt as to the consequences of his actions as he prepared to make his final decision. The new G.I. Bill would have given veterans a much-needed increase in education assistance, bringing their benefits far more in line with their World War II predecessors. By signing it, Ford would carry through with his promise of caring for veterans that would, without question, be greeted with approval by the overwhelming majority of the public. But the new bill severely tested Ford's dedication to "Whip Inflation Now." His decision would be litmus test for where the new administration's priorities lay. At 3:00 p.m. on November 26, Ford announced his decision and sent the following message to Congress:

> I am returning today without my approval H.R. 12628, a bill which would provide what I consider an excessive increase and liberalization of veterans education and training benefits.
>
> Instead, I urge the Congress to send me a veterans' education bill along the lines that I have proposed. By doing so, we can avoid adding another half billion dollar load to the already overburdened taxpayer. Failure to do so will mean that the Congress will in the aggregate – Federal Pay deferral, Railroad Retirement and Veterans Education – add over one and a half billion dollars to the Federal deficit in 1975.
>
> This bill which I am returning to the Congress provides benefits that are greater then those granted World War II and Korea veterans. It would cost taxpayers half a billion dollars more in fiscal year 1975 than is appropriate in view of the country's current economic circumstances.
>
> The decision not to sign this bill has not been an easy one. But it is necessary if all of us are to operate with essential budgetary restraint. The Nation must reduce Federal spending if we are to stop the inflation spiral.[66]

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[65] Memorandum to Warren Hendriks from William Timmons, November 23, 1974, Folder "SP 2-3-27 Veto: Veterans Education Bill, 11/26/74, Box 1, WHCF Subject File, Ford Library.

[66] White House Press Release, November 26, 1974, Folder "Veterans Education Benefits," Box 11, William E. Timmons Files, Ford Library.

Ford went on to state, "I continue to support a responsible increase in education benefits for veterans," and reiterated his call for an 18.2 percent increase in monthly allowance instead of the proposed 22.7 percent.[67] At a press conference on the morning of his veto message, White House Press secretary Ronald H. Nessen further clarified Ford's position when he told reporters that, "two portions of the bill could not be justified under the current economic circumstances. Those two sections are the $600 loan program and the extension of eligibility from 36 months to 45."[68]

As soon as Ford made announced his veto, the veteran community made their disappointment known. A November 26 VFW press release accused the President of doing "a disservice to those who performed a service for their country when called upon to fight."[69] John J. Stang, the recently elected Commander in Chief of the VFW wrote to House Speaker Carl Albert to assure him "that the more than 1.8 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its more than 500,000 members of the Ladies Auxiliary are in total agreement that the veto of this Veterans education Bill must be promptly overridden by the Congress."[70] The American Legion's James Wagonseller accused Ford of favoring "draft dodgers and deserters" (a reference to Ford's controversial draft-dodger clemency plan) while undercutting much needed assistance for the Vietnam

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[67] Ibid.

[68] White House News Conference, November 11, 1974, Folder "November 26, 1974 (No. 81)," Box 3, Ronald H. Nessen, Press Secretary Briefings, Ford Library.

[69] Letter to Carl Albert from John J. Stang, November 26, 1974, Folder 2, Box 172, Carl Albert Legislative series, Carl Albert Center.

[70] VFW press release, attached to a letter to Carl Albert from John J. Stang, November 26, 1974, Folder 2, Box 172, Carl Albert Legislative series, Carl Albert Center.

veteran.[71] Charles Huber of the Disabled American Veterans informed Albert, "We view the President's action with a deep sense of regret; and urge you, on behalf of the 450,000 members of the DAV, to vote to override the veto of H.R. 12828."[72]

The chances of an override appeared good. Congress had already demonstrated its willingness to challenge Ford in its battles over the Railroad Retirement Act and federal pay increases. Ron Nessen told reporters that Ford made his decision to veto the veterans' readjustment act with the full expectation of an override. On November 30, Richard Roudebush told reporters, "I have no question in my mind that Congress will take the necessary action to override the veto. I'm sure the President is just [as] aware of it as I am."[73] Republican leaders on the Hill such as John J. Rhodes, the Republican leader of the House, informed reporters that he intended to vote to override Ford's veto. Republican senator John G. Tower stated that "There was virtually no sentiment for sustaining [the] President's veto, and I would predict there would be very little support for it.[74] Strom Thurmond added, "It is not my view that those who bit the bullets in Vietnam should be the first ones to bite the bullet back home."[75]

The vote to override Ford's veto took place on December 3. Just hours before the vote, Ron Nessen stated the White House's view that "when Congress votes, the President feels that it will not be voting simply to uphold or override a veto, but what it will be doing is voting on whether to increase the Federal Budget by over a half billion

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[71] Quoted in the *New York Times*, November 27, 1974, 15.

[72] Letter to Carl Albert from Charles L. Huber, November 27, 1974, Folder 2, Box 172, Carl Albert Legislative series, Carl Albert Center.

[73] Quoted in the *New York Times*, December 1, 1974, 61.

[74] Quoted in ibid., November 27, 1974, 15.

[75] Quoted in ibid., December 4, 1974, 25.

dollars above the Administration's proposal."[76] That afternoon, on Capitol Hill, a succession of House representatives and senators stood up to make forceful arguments for overriding Ford's veto. On the floor of the House, William Jennings Bryan Dorn opened the deliberations by systematically attacking the key points contained in the veto message. He called the President "simply misinformed" for claiming that the new benefits package would give Vietnam era veterans greater benefits than their World War II predecessors.[77] He went on to claim that previous G.I. Bills had yielded a return of between three and six dollars in increased taxes for every dollar spent. New Jersey representative Henry Helstoski followed Dorn, arguing that it would be "grossly unfair to our Vietnam veterans to provide a penny less than that called for in the bill now before the House."[78] Numerous other representatives spoke after Helstoski, each one pointing out errors in Ford's logic and reiterating the urgent need for an override. No one spoke up in defense of the veto.

In the Senate, Vance Hartke began the assault on the veto message. In addition to echoing the criticisms made in the House, Hartke noted that Ford had ignored the considerable compromises already made in conference to the original bills. Hartke also pointed out that despite the veteran population increasing by about six million in the previous few years, federal expenditure on veterans' benefits had remained around 5 percent and would remain as such under the new proposals. Attacking Ford's economic philosophy, he went on, "to focus on Government spending as the principal cause of

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[76] White House News Conference, December 3, 1974, Folder "November 26, 1974 (No. 86)," Box 4, Ronald H. Nessen, Press Secretary Briefings, Ford Library.

[77] *Congressional Record-House*, December 3, 1974, 37876.

[78] Ibid., 37879.

inflation is to indulge in a fantasy that may comfort traditional mythology, but does little to deal with its true causes."[79] Strom Thurmond followed, adding, "I think he [Ford] is going to be a great leader for this country. However, I feel he is in error in vetoing this particular bill."[80] In between comments from Alan Cranston, Bob Dole, Edward Kennedy, George McGovern, and others in support of the override, Charles Mathis Jr. reminded his fellow senators that this bill was not "some vast pork barrel program," but "a commitment to the men and women who fought in our most recent war."[81]

By late afternoon, both houses were ready to vote. In the end, the outcome was not even close. The House voted for an override by a margin of 394-10, with thirty not casting votes. Nine of the ten dissenters were lame ducks following the November elections. The Senate passed the measure by an equally resounding 90-1 vote with nine not voting. Only Michigan senator and deputy Republican Leader Robert P. Griffin sided with the White House.

With palpable relief, the veteran community expressed their appreciation for the override. June A. Willenz, Executive Director of the American Veterans Committee told Carl Albert, "A victory for justice and equality was won last week with the override of the veto of the GI Bill for Vietnam veterans. Your leadership helped make this GI Bill a reality."[82] In a December 12 meeting with Richard Roudebush, Timothy L. Craig thanked the new VA Administrator for his support of the benefits bill. Craig also noted,

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[79] *Congressional Record-Senate*, December 3, 1974, 37839.
[80] Ibid., 37843.
[81] Ibid., 37849.
[82] Letter to Carl Albert from June A. Willenz, November 26, 1974, Folder 2, Box 172, Carl Albert Legislative series, Carl Albert Center. This folder contains many other letters from appreciative veterans and veteran organizations.

"during the brief period in which Mr. Richard L. Roudebush has been the Veterans Administrator, there has been a marked change in the VA's attitude and policy toward Vietnam era veterans."[83]

H.R.12628, the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 became Public Law 53-508 on December 3, 1974. On December 15, the VA started mailing out over 1.2 million checks for benefits retroactive to September 1, in the hopes that most of the eligible veterans would receive them before Christmas. For the single veteran claiming no dependants the checks amounted to 200 dollars, a veteran claiming one dependent could expect 240 dollars.

In its final form, the 1974 G.I. Bill represented a compromise between competing branches of government and competing economic philosophies. The liberal provisions of the original Senate proposal passed on June 19 had been greatly reduced, but not in the drastic way envisioned by the White House. Ford had to look elsewhere in his effort to reduce the federal budget. Although many at the time viewed Ford's obstructionism as a sign of callousness and indifference, the President saw the fight over veterans funding as an earnest crusade against an inflation problem that he genuinely believed could undermine the fabric of American society. Despite the political drawback of being the first president to ever veto a veterans' education benefits bill, Ford made what he considered to be a stand vital to the national interest. Ford later wrote that he had hoped

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[83] Priority Views of The National Association of Concerned Veterans Presented to the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs, December 12, 1974, Folder "National Association of Concerned Veterans (1-3)," Box 49, Theodore C. Marrs Files, Ford Library. In fairness to his predecessor, Roudebush indicated to Roy Ash in his October 17 letter that Donald Johnson would also have approved a 23 percent increase for veterans had he remained as VA Administrator.

that "If the executive branch could set an example of fiscal restraint by trimming its own proposals the Congress might be persuaded to follow suit."[84]

Congress did not follow suit. Although the process had been a protracted and often contentious one, the combined efforts of the House and Senate ensured that for Vietnam era veterans schooling under the G.I. Bill now represented a more realistic option to aid their transition back to civilian life. And if Ford remained concerned about the inflationary effects of the new benefits, the news was about to get worse. Roy Ash resigned as director of OMB in December 1974. His successor, James T. Lynn, landed the unenviable task of informing Ford early in 1975, "[The] VA has alerted us to a recent spurt in veteran benefit applications. By the end of February, the GI Bill education program was paying 91,000 trainees over that estimated in the FY 1976 President's Budget. . . . However, the increases seen thus far are just the tip of the iceberg. From the sparse data thus far available in March, it appears that the trend may go even higher."[85] Vietnam veterans had waited a long time—too long—to receive a reasonable reward for their service and to gain an opportunity to return to school. Now that the government had finally extended this opportunity, they took full advantage. In the years following the passage of the 1974 G.I. Bill the Vietnam veterans began to claim their education benefits in unprecedented numbers. Although the costs to the government exceeded Ford's worst fears, the benefits to the lives of veterans would be far greater.

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[84] Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 220.

[85] Memorandum to Gerald Ford from James T. Lynn, March 24, 1975, Folder "VA3 Educational Programs, 1/1/75-4/30/75," Box 2, WHCF, Veterans Administration-Executive, Ford Library.

Chapter 6

BACK TO SCHOOL, FINALLY

> Most of us were not walking around publicizing the fact that we were veterans. . . . I just think many of us wanted to get on with out lives.
>
> Dave Hollingsworth, Vietnam veteran

In part because of the publicity surrounding the political battles over the 1974 G.I. Bill, but more importantly because benefits had finally reached a level where veterans could now realistically pursue a higher education degree, Vietnam veterans flooded back to school throughout 1975 and 1976. The numbers of veterans in higher education had increased gradually since 1966 as a natural result of more veterans reentering society, but the upward curve spiked noticeably after the passage of the 1974 G.I. Bill. In 1967, less than 500,000 veterans used their benefits for higher education. In 1971, the number had reached a million. In 1976, fully ten years after the first eligible veterans came home, over 2.9 million veterans received education benefits under the G.I. Bill. About one third of veterans in 1976 used their benefits for vocational training, leaving almost two million in institutions of higher education across the country. The number of veterans enrolled in 1976 alone exceeded the number of veterans that attended schools during the entire course of the Korean G.I. Bill (1.2 million) and almost equaled the entire number of World War II veterans that entered higher education under the original 1944 program (2.2 million). Not every veteran enrolled in 1976 served during the Vietnam era. Some earned their benefits for service before 1964. But the percentage of just Vietnam era veterans alone that claimed their education benefits reached 63.6 by 1973. Already, this number was far above the 50.5 percent of World War II veterans that participated under

the original program. Moreover, whereas only 2.2 million out of 15.6 million World War II veterans used their benefits for higher education, 3.6 million out of 6.5 million eligible veterans used their benefits to train at the college level since the passage of the 1966 bill.[1]

As earlier critics of the program had pointed out, usage percentages remained an imperfect test of the program's success or failure. But at the time because the VA kept no data on a veteran graduation rates or how the program affected their lives the levels of usage remained one of the few points of comparison with previous programs. Certainly, these figures took away one of the early main criticisms thrown at the Vietnam era bills in Congress, namely that low participation indicated that the program had failed.

The established veterans groups seemed to believe that the government had done enough to compensate Vietnam veterans with the 1974 bill. When Congress debated a 1976 proposal to allow Vietnam veterans even more time to claim their benefits they made their opinions known. The 1974 bill already allowed Vietnam veterans longer than any previous generation of veterans to claim benefits by allowing them ten years from departing the service to complete their degree. The 1976 proposal sought to provide an additional year of eligibility. Proponents of the extension argued that benefits had been so low at the start of the program that many needed the extra time because they could not have previously afforded to go to school. For the American Legion, VFW, and DAV, which still had the interests of the aging World War II generation at the forefront of their concerns, the extension went too far. Thomas C. Walker, Commander in Chief of the VFW called on Carl Albert to oppose the measure and added, "We believe, all things

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[1] *Veterans Administration Annual Report, 1976* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 73.

considered, the current GI Bill is *the most generous of all three GI Bills* [emphasis mine] and, again, there is no tenable justification for a further extension of the delimiting period."[2] The American Legion supported only a cost of living increase for disabled veterans and education benefits but opposed the eligibility extension. The Legion urged Albert to "insist that these funds be directed to higher priority programs for millions of war veterans and their dependents, which in addition to needed costs of living increases in education programs would include improved compensation and pensions, and sorely needed changes in medical and hospital programs."[3] The Disabled Veterans of America's constituents had a more obvious reason to oppose excessively liberal education payments. The DAV expressed initial opposition to the original 1944 bill for fear that it would divert funds away from disabled veterans whose needs clearly exceeded the returning able-bodied veteran. A similar fear of guided the thinking of DAV National Director of Legislation Charles L. Huber when he expressed the organizations concerns that the proposed increase "will make it impossible for the Congress to pass legislation of a much higher priority within the limits of the budget for Veterans' Benefits and Services." Specifically, Huber called for increased disability payments, pensions, and

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[2] Letter to Carl Albert from Thomas C. Walker, Commander in Chief, Veterans of Foreign Wars, July 15, 1976, Folder 11, Box 211, Carl Albert Legislative papers, Carl Albert Center.

[3] Letter to Carl Albert from Mylio S. Kraja, Director National Legislative Commission of the American Legion, July 19, 1976, Carl Albert Legislative papers, Carl Albert Center.

medical treatment and added, "We believe there is no justification to reduce funding for these programs in favor of an extension of educational benefits."[4]

The Ford Administration clearly believed the 1974 G.I. Bill had gone far enough in compensating Vietnam veterans. In 1975 Ford even proposed reducing the time veterans could claim benefits back down to eight years. VA Administrator Richard Roudebush outlined the administration's justifications for the proposals. He suggested that the G.I. Bill constituted a temporary readjustment tool and not an ongoing entitlement program. He also noted, correctly, that Vietnam veterans enjoyed far more generous eligibility terms than had veterans of previous wars. The current bill, suggested Roudebush "has the effect of discriminating against veterans serving in earlier periods."[5] Despite Ford's continued foot dragging and the waning of interest of some veterans' organizations by the mid-1970s, Congress continued to do just enough to keep the veterans coming back to school throughout the remainder of the decade.

In October 1976, Congress passed S.969, Public Law 94-502, which gave veterans an 8 percent cost-of-living benefits increase. The bill allowed disabled veterans an indefinite period in which to claim their education benefits. S.969 also established a new experimental education program to cover veterans of the new All-Volunteer Force entering service after January 1, 1977. The new program required participants to pay up to seventy-five dollars a month into a fund that the VA would then match at a rate of 2-

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[4] Letter to Carl Albert from Charles L. Huber, National Director of Legislation of the Disabled American Veterans, July 16, 1976, Carl Albert Legislative papers, Carl Albert Center.

[5] Memorandum for Roger Semerad from Richard Roudebush, March 27, 1975, Folder "VA3 Education Program, 8/9/1974-11/30/1974," Box 1, WHCF, Subject File VA General, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

to-1. A more generous and veterans' education bill passed through Congress the following year.

H.R.8701, Public Law 95-202, signed by President Jimmy Carter on November 23, 1977, provided veterans a 6.6 percent increase in benefits and increased the amount of loans available to 2,500 dollars. Veterans could also claim loans for an additional two years after their ten-year eligibility expired if they needed the extra time to finish their degree. The bill also liberalized the requirements for a school to secure approval from the VA. One of the bill's provisions, adopted by a voice vote from an amendment by Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), finally made Women's Air Force Service Pilots of World War II, eligible for veteran benefits. This provision affected nearly 900 surviving WASPs.

The most contentious debates over the bill remained, again, those surrounding direct tuition payment, and, again, Olin Teague proved to be the biggest obstacle to the passage of a direct tuition payment measure. As he entered the final few years of his life, Teague remained as adamant as ever that the government had done enough for Vietnam veterans and as stubborn as ever in rebuking overtures to offer more generous increases. Despite proposals from over 100 congressmen to add direct tuition payment to the G.I. Bill amendments, Teague, backed by House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Ray Roberts (D-TX) brought their bill to the floor without such a provision. Much to the chagrin of many of his fellow representatives, Teague also circumvented a full discussion of the bill in the Veterans Affairs Committee where the members could have debated the issue or debated a compromise with a more generous bill circulating in the Senate. He also sent the bill to the floor under a procedure that denied any amendments, preventing any representative from bringing the tuition issue to a vote. The House bill, H.R.8701

offered only the 6.6 percent benefits increase. One representative called Teague's measure the "anti-Vietnam-era veteran" bill.[6]

In the Senate, Alan Cranston proposed a novel and convoluted way of offering veterans relief from high tuition. Under S.457, a veteran paying more than 1,000 dollars per year in tuition could put any remaining funds from their forty-five month eligibility toward their tuition if they finished their degree before the forty-five month limit. In debates on the floor, the Senate lowered the eligibility ceiling to veterans paying over 700 dollars a year. The Senate rejected overtures from Jacob Javits (R-NY) and Daniel Moynihan (D-NY) to lower the benefits increase to 4 percent and distribute the money saved to veterans who needed relief from high tuition.

Both bills passed their respective houses unanimously. The House and Senate thrashed out their differences informally and without conference. The final version of the bill offered only a slight relief from tuition costs. Veterans could use any unused benefits from their forty-five month eligibility to reduce a portion of their VA loans but only if a state or local government agency matched the amount. Complicating things further, the amount of the loans forgiven had to be less than two thirds of the tuition a veteran paid above 700 dollars per year.

Once the bills passed Congress, they found a more receptive audience in the White House than previous veterans' legislation encountered. Jimmy Carter did incur the wrath of some of the older veterans groups with his blanket pardon of Vietnam War draft deserters and his attempts to streamline the VA medical system. Carter also questioned the practice of giving veterans preferential treatment in federal employment. Echoing

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[6] William Ford (D-MI), quoted in the *Washington Post*, November 21, 1977, 19.

some of the same sentiments expressed by Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson, both of whom questioned the limits of the veteran's privileged status, Carter suggested that giving veterans preference in government jobs "unduly interferes with employment opportunities for women and minorities and with efficient and businesslike management."[7] He attracted much criticism for this stand from the veterans lobbies. On most other veterans' issues, including education benefits, Carter proved more willing than either Nixon or Ford to sign the bills sent forward by Congress. Carter also increased the education opportunities available to all Americans, including veterans, by expanding Basic Educational Opportunity Grants, and liberalizing both the work-study program and federal subsidies to student loans.[8] Moreover, Carter's choice of Veterans Administrator ensured that the Vietnam veteran had one of their own in one of the most important federal positions in veterans' affairs.

Max Cleland headed the VA from 1977 through 1981. Cleland earned Bronze and Silver Stars while fighting in Vietnam. He survived the siege at Khe Sanh in 1968, but days later lost both legs and one arm attempting to pick up a dropped grenade. He described the incident as a "freaky war accident" and downplayed his bravery in trying to shield other soldiers from the blast.[9] In 1969, Cleland had criticized the VA medical establishment in Congressional hearings where he revealed his own struggles to receive

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[7] Quoted in the *Washington Post*, December 7, 1978, 39. For a summary of Carter's record on veterans' issues, see *Congress and the Nation, Volume V, 1977-1980* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1981), 177-190.

[8] *Congress and the Nation, Vol. V,* 665-666.

[9] *Washington Post*, April 18, 1977, B6. See also Max Cleland, *Strong At the Broken Places: A Personal Story* (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing, 1989).

artificial limbs or even a wheelchair.[10] The *Washington Post* described him as "handsome and articulate. Imaginative and tough, a hell-raising witness on Capitol Hill for GI rights, driving his own car to work despite his physical handicaps, surrounding himself with other Vietnam veterans as advisors, fanning the fire in his gut to fulfill a passion for public service."[11] He became the youngest ever head of the VA at the age of thirty four, and promised to "institutionalize hope, caring, sensitivity" that had been starkly absent under his predecessors.[12] Speaking of his own disability, Cleland saw himself as "a public reminder of the price that's been paid."[13] Cleland helped steer through much-needed legislation for Vietnam veterans including a new psychological counseling program for Vietnam veterans that the Senate had passed on four previous occasions only for the House and previous administrations to cut them down.

Vietnam veterans also gained new allies in Congress. After being elected the Democratic representative for Michigan in 1977, air force veteran David Bonior formed the Vietnam Veterans in Congress group. By 1980, the caucus had nineteen members, all Vietnam veterans, from both parties and from both Houses. Decrying previous government treatment of Vietnam veterans, Bonior stated "Part of the problem lies in under-representation. Although 19 of the 28 members of the House Veterans Committee are veterans, only one is a Vietnam-era veteran. Anyone claiming that the Vietnam vet has been adequately cared for simply ignores the facts."[14] The Vietnam veteran caucus made their concerns known to Max Cleland over such issues as the continued geographic

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[10] *Washington Post*, April 18, 1977, B1.
[11] Ibid., August 28, 1977, B4.
[12] Ibid. April 18, 1977, B1
[13] Ibid., August 7, 1977, 3.
[14] Ibid., May 8, 1978, 22.

inequalities of the G.I. Bill and the lack of assistance for veterans with drug, psychological, or employment difficulties.

Cleland and the Vietnam Veterans' in Congress fought for better benefits and services for Vietnam veterans as the 1970s drew to a close. But their influence came too late for the G.I. Bill. By the end of the decade, most Vietnam veterans had already used their education benefits and the program was entering its final years. The G.I. Bill had become just one of a number of contentious issues for Vietnam veterans in Washington. Increasingly, the issues of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and the use of Agent Orange began to dominate the attention of the veterans' affairs committees and the veteran community. The G.I. Bill no longer represented the hot topic it had been during the first half of the decade. Several cost of living increases followed in 1980, raising the monthly allowance to 327 dollars for the single veteran, and 1981 increasing it to 342 dollars, until the last major increase in education benefits for the Vietnam era veteran became law on October 17, 1984. The 1984 law gave the single veteran 376 dollars a month to live off.

The initial low amount of benefits offered and slow rate of benefit increases undoubtedly contributed to the delay in many veterans using their education benefits. But factors other than lack of money also accounted for the relatively sluggish rate at which some came back to school. Many Vietnam veterans returned home with a different mindset and attitude toward their service than previous veterans. Unlike many World War II veterans, some Vietnam veterans did not want to bother with the bureaucratic process associated with claiming benefits and in particular wanted nothing to do with the government that had sent them to such a confusing and controversial war. One veteran commented, "One big problem, is their [veterans'] mistrust of bureaucrats.

When you were in Vietnam, you never saw anything accomplished."[15] Victor Rodriguez, a navy veteran adds, "What happens is, when a guy gets out of the service, he doesn't want to do anything with the government. When I got out, I just wanted to relax for a while. The guys on the streets told me the VA was just a hassle."[16]

Many sought to forget their military experience and eschewed anything associated with the veteran community including the established veterans' organizations. Immediately after service, few Vietnam veterans entered the Veterans of Foreign Wars or the American Legion. For some, veterans' organizations seemed like places where old guys sat around, drank, and reminisced about what they did in the war. Understandably, this held little appeal for Vietnam veterans, many of whom were trying to forget their wartime experience. Fred Hart, a truck driver in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive, never really felt his service was worth "worth something" until decades later. Hart never joined a veteran organization and recalls, "the country didn't much want to bother with us, so we really didn't feel a part of the veteran community . . . I don't know why. I never had no desire to join."[17] After returning from service in a combat engineering battalion in Vietnam and Germany in 1972, Dave Hollingsworth took several years to come to terms with his veteran status and never considered joining a veteran's organization. He notes, "there was a bit of a climate in those years that . . . with some of the traditional service organizations that we may not fit in. . . . And the other thing was that if I had joined a

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[15] *New York Times*, October 4, 1973, 95.

[16] Ibid., April 9, 1972, 46.

[17] Fred Hart, interview with author and G. Kurt Piehler, Knoxville, Tennessee, April 21, 2001.

service organization, I would have had to realize my 'vetness.'"[18] Given their antipathy toward their service, the government, and to their veteran status, some needed a cooling off period before facing the bureaucracy associated with the VA and with universities. Others might also have been concerned with the way students and faculty would receive them when they returned to campus. Few would have looked forward to the same receptive environment World War II veterans faced when they returned to school.

The World War II veterans transformed campus life when they returned home. Long lines for registration, overcrowded classrooms, and rows of temporary housing units became the norm in many institutions. The University of Wisconsin at Madison erected "Camp Randall," a trailer park housing married veterans adjacent to their football stadium. Similar "G.I villages" cropped up across the country. World War II veterans became eminent members of their university communities, assuming leadership roles in campus organizations and fraternities. Seventy percent of the University of Michigan Rose Bowl-winning team of 1947 went to college on the G.I. Bill, as did the Heisman trophy winner that same year, Notre Dame's Johnny Lujak.[19] Their sheer weight of numbers ensured that the World War II veterans maintained a visible presence on campus throughout the late 1940s and into the 1950s. At Rutgers University, by 1948 veterans comprised 9,000 of the schools 16,000 students. At the same time, Stanford's enrollment reached 7,200 up from 4,800. In 1947, veterans comprised 49.2 percent of all

[18] Dave Hollingsworth, interview with author, April 15, 2005.

[19] Milton Greenberg, *The G.I. Bill: The Law That Changed America* (New York: Lickle Publishing, 1997), 50-51.

enrolled students across the nation and nearly 70 percent of all male students.[20] As was true of the reception most veterans received throughout society, students and teachers alike treated the World War II veteran with respect for the services they had rendered their country. But Vietnam veterans had every reason to fear that they would not receive such a warm welcome when they returned to campus.

Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, college campuses remained the focus of much of the nation's anti-war protests.[21] From Berkley's Free Speech Movement and the nationwide Students for a Democratic Society's attack on American indolence to the nationwide teach-ins and student strikes, campuses seemed ablaze with unrest. By the end of the 1960s, many of the students who had agitated for civil liberties at the start of the decade directed their ire toward the war in Vietnam. Students helped fuel the Vietnam Summer in 1967, a movement to "educate" the public about America's Vietnam policy. Riots broke out at Oakland in the fall of 1967 in protest to the draft. Soon after, violent clashes erupted between police and students at the University of Wisconsin when protesters blocked a recruiter from napalm and Agent Orange manufacturers Dow Chemical.[22] Three years later protestors exploded a bomb at a research facility at the University of Wisconsin, killing a graduate student. By 1969, a Gallup poll indicated that 69 percent of students considered themselves "doves" and opposed the war. Protest marches and student strikes became more commonplace as the decade wore on, many of

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[20] Keith Olson, *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1974).

[21] Marc Jason Gilbert, *The Vietnam War on Campus: Other Voices, More Distant Drums* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001).

[22] David Maraniss, *They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

them turning violent in nature. During the academic year 1969-70, police had to intervene and arrest students in 731 separate incidents nationwide. Four hundred and ten of these incidents incurred property damage and 230 resulted in physical violence.[23] One hundred and ninety seven attacks on ROTC buildings confirmed the anti-military timbre of the protests.

The most dramatic and violent student protest took place in the aftermath of Richard Nixon's announcement of the Cambodian incursion on April 30, 1970. Almost immediately, strikes broke out on campuses throughout the country. Protestors attacked thirty ROTC buildings in the first week of May alone, including the ROTC building at Kent State University, Ohio.[24] On May 4, as the turmoil continued at Kent State, Ohio National Guardsmen opened fire on a crowd of students, killing four and wounding nine others. Ten days later, police opened fire on students at Jackson State, Mississippi, killing two. The combined outrage over Cambodia and the subsequent killings turned up the heat on campuses across the nation throughout the month of May.

The vast majority of Vietnam veterans that used the G.I. Bill did so after the benefits increases of 1972 and 1974 so they would have been well aware of the anti-war sentiment on many campuses. But not every school suffered the same kind of turmoil as Ohio State, or Berkley, or Wisconsin. The campus reception for veterans would have varied depending on when and where the veteran returned to campus. The South, for example, saw few violent large-scale anti-war protests. Southern students did offer up some anti-war resistance. After 1966, the Southern Student Organizing Committee

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[23] Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 409.

[24] Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 409-410.

(SSOC) diverted some of its attentions from the Civil Rights struggle to organize numerous anti-war activities across the South including a Peace Tour across southern campuses between February 1967 and December 1968. But southern anti-war activities never reached the same intensity as some other regions of the nation. Indeed, the SSOC encountered much hostility on several campuses. At the University of South Florida, students seemed ready, as one SSOC member recalls, "to rip us apart." At Erskine College, South Carolina, one student pulled a gun on an SSOC member and told him, "I just might kill you" because "those damn gooks" killed his brother while serving in Vietnam.[25] The experience of the SSOC serves as a reminder that—contrary popular mythology—many campuses retained a strong conservative presence throughout the 1960s. Such schools might have given veterans a far warmer greeting than the more radical schools.

Time, in addition to location, would also have affected the veteran's campus experience. Veterans choosing to attend school from 1966 through 1971 would clearly have expected more opposition than the veterans returning to school after the passage of the 1974 G.I. Bill. With the war winding down rapidly, violent student protests subsided after reaching a crescendo from 1969 to 1970.[26] Doug Simon, an air force intelligence officer in Vietnam from April 1965 to May 1966 returned to Drew University in 1972 and encountered a "post-sixties depression. There was a period of enormous activity," recounts Simon, "from about 1968 to around 1971, and then I think it began to get old. . . . The counterculture was getting tired. . . . This campus didn't have a great deal of vitality

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[25] Gregg L. Michel, *Struggle for a Better South: The Southern Student Organizing Committee, 1964-1969* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 149, 151.

[26] Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 411.

to it."[27] With the potential for such variation, every veteran's experience may have been unique. But anecdotal evidence suggests that many were able to return to school without facing much hostility.

Before returning to the University of Tennessee, Dave Hollingsworth traveled to Ohio State the day after the campus shootings at Kent State. He recalls watching students running across campus with handkerchiefs over their faces, and then "All of a sudden, the tear gas started drifting our way. . . . The bells and whistles went off and I knew there had to be some sort of demonstration nearby."[28] The unrest led the authorities to evacuate Ohio State and send in over 6,000 national Guardsmen to patrol the campus.[29] Although he bore no grudge against the protestors, Hollingsworth feared that many had blurred the line between the war and the warrior. But if he had anticipated a rough reception on campus he need not have worried.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, like most Southern schools, saw few widespread protests against the war or against veterans during the 1960s and early 1970s. Three thousand protesters took to the street in the wake of the Kent State shootings.[30] The most celebrated protest at the university occurred several weeks later on May 28 during a Billy Graham crusade at Tennessee's Neyland football stadium. Richard Nixon decided to attend, his first public appearance since the Kent State shootings. The administration considered Knoxville one of the nation's few "safe" campuses. After visiting the campus for a football game, one *Los Angeles Times* reporter described UT as

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[27] Doug Simon, interview with Kurt Piehler, November 12, 2003.

[28] Dave Hollingsworth interview.

[29] Mark Delman Boren, *Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 187.

[30] *UT Daily Beacon*, May 6, 1971, 1.

"another world, a place where kids listen instead of shout"[31] Several hundred students and staff did use Nixon's visit to protest his Cambodia invasion. The protestors marched from the University Center into the stadium, held signs aloft, and chanted anti-war slogans as Nixon gave a speech. Although many arrests followed in the coming days, Knoxville authorities dropped the charges against most of the protestors. The protest caused a few waves on campus for several months, but thereafter the campus remained quiet. Some veterans may have experienced individual acts of opposition at UT, but Hollingsworth suffered no adverse reaction to his veteran status.

Similarly, when Fred Owens used his G.I. Bill to attend Columbia State University in 1975 and finished up his degree at Troy State in Georgia, the students never questioned his service. Most never knew the horrors he had witnessed fighting in the Central Highlands in 1965 and 1966, because most never asked. As many veterans discovered throughout society, even if people did not treat veterans with outright hostility, most simply did not want to know.[32]

Even at the University of Wisconsin, when Tom Deits returned to Law School in 1970 he suffered no backlash from his fellow students. Deits served as a combat infantryman in Vietnam in 1969 and 1970 and won the Bronze Star and a Purple Heart after suffering wounds from a fragment grenade. He chose to wear his fatigue jacket every day and recalled that he "never received a second look." Again, as with the general response many Vietnam veterans received from society at large, Diets fellow students

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[31] Quoted in an excerpt from the "Vignettes" boxes of Milton Klein's Papers at the University of Tennessee's Special Collections Library, collected for his *Volunteer Moments, Vignettes of the History of the University of Tennessee, 1794-1994* (Knoxville, Tenn.: Office of the University Historian, University of Tennessee, 1996).

[32] Fred Owens, interview with author, May 19, 2004.

treated his veteran status with a resounding "'So what?' You're a veteran of a war but it's not that big of a deal."[33] Another veteran attending Wisconsin, a combat engineer wounded in Vietnam in 1967, did think that the Campus was "not very friendly" toward veterans when he attended from 1969 through 1974, but personally never experienced any problems.[34] Roger Stephen Boeker also suffered no adverse reaction from students when he attended Santa Ana College in 1975 and City College of Seattle from 1976 to 1977, although he concedes, "I was aggressive enough that most persons did not dare to share their feelings about my very personal and traumatic experiences in Vietnam."[35] Finally, Tom Crane, a former air force intelligence veteran feared that when he returned to Michigan State that his fellow students might "consider me a 'Fascist Pig' because I was a vet." Crane's worst fears never materialized and he enjoyed a quiet and successful first semester back in school.[36]

Some veterans did receive some abuse when they came back to school. At the University of Oregon, Doug Simon recalls one student yelling "Baby Killer" at one of his classmates, even though the recipient of the abuse had served only in Europe and had never set foot in Vietnam. Simon narrowly avoided being blackballed from the University after one professor feared he might use his military intelligence background to

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[33] Tom Diets, correspondence with author, July 2004.

[34] Greg Vodak, correspondence with author, July 2004

[35] Roger Stephen Boeker, correspondence with author, July 2004.

[36] Quoted in Terence Shea, "Back to School From the Wars—GIs on Campus Find Their Battles are Not Over," *The National Observer*, February 15, 1971, reprinted in *Source Material On the Vietnam Veteran* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), 323.

inform the CIA or Pentagon on anti-war activities. Overall, however, Simon recalls, "I was treated well" by the Oregon students.[37]

A 1980 VA commissioned Louis Harris and Associates poll on Vietnam veterans adds further credence to the suggestion that veterans returned to campus without too much disruption. The poll—a follow up from their 1971 study—represented the largest effort to quantify the veteran experience ever undertaken. In addition to interviewing Vietnam veterans and the public, the poll also included the views of over 500 educators in colleges and campuses across the country. The educators overwhelmingly agreed that other students associating veterans "with the war in Vietnam" represented "Not A Problem At All" (66 percent) or "Not Much Of A Problem" (23 percent). Similarly, students associating veterans "with the military" represented "Not A Problem At All" (73 percent), or "Not Much Of A Problem" (18 percent). None of those polled considered the military association to be "A Great Problem." [38]

Faculty members at institutions of higher education seem also to have avoided confrontation with returning veterans. Dave Hollingsworth recalls that professors "were sensitive on things that could push our buttons . . . and really, if anything, leaned over backwards to try to be accommodating."[39] The Louis Harris and Associates poll confirmed 89 percent of educators believed that faculty associating veterans with their participation in the Vietnam War represented "Not A Problem At All" (73 percent) or "Not Much Of A Problem" (16 percent). The educators also believed that veterans being

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[37] Doug Simon interview.

[38] Louis Harris and Associates, *Myths and Realities: A Study of Attitudes Toward Vietnam Era Veterans* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 179.

[39] Dave Hollingsworth interview.

"so changed by their military experience that they don't fit in on campus" represented "Not A Problem At All" (61 percent) or "Not Much Of A Problem" (20 percent).[40]

Perhaps part of the reason most veterans avoided the ire of students or faculty that might have opposed the war was that many maintained a low profile when they did return to campus. Unlike the World War II veterans who wore their uniforms with pride, many Vietnam veterans wore no outward symbols to indicate their veteran status. Hollingsworth notes, "Most of us were not walking around publicizing the fact that we were veterans. . . . I just think many of us wanted to get on with out lives." Hollingsworth grew out his beard and his hair "to just try to blend back in" and adds, "I think that's what many vets did."[41] Hollingsworth did not even realize that he shared a classroom with about ten other veterans until during one cold spell they all wore their field jackets to class to keep warm. When Morocco Coleman returned to Atlanta's Morris Brown College in 1977, he noted that veterans had "very little presence" on campus. He recalls that his fellow students "didn't know I was a vet. I wanted to put all that behind me and catch up with my peer group in the life experience."[42] Some veterans, as has been well documented, did become vocal opponents of the war speaking at protest marches or joining the Vietnam Veterans against the War organization, but most just sought a way to get on with their lives.[43] Once Vietnam veterans did decide to return to campus, once they had come to terms with their service, once the money was adequate, and once

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[40] *Myths and Realities*, 179.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Morrocco Coleman, correspondence with author, April 2004.

[43] Gerald Nicosia, *Home to War: A History of the Vietnam Veterans' Movement* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001).

campus violence had subsided, most veterans made excellent students. In excelling in the classroom, they shared a common heritage with their World War II predecessors.

Following the announcement of the original G.I. Bill in 1944, many educators feared the effects of millions of veterans flooding the nation's campuses. In a famous *Colliers* article, University of Chicago President Robert Hutchins argued that an influx of veterans with low education levels and little preparation for college life might lead to "Colleges and universities . . . converted into educational hobo jungles" and called the G.I. Bill "a threat to American education."[44] Harvard's Seymour Harris agreed that the G.I. Bill "carried the principle of democratization too far."[45] Veterans soon proved the naysayers wrong and became some of the more mature and academically proficient students of their generation. In 1947, the *New York Times* education editor wrote, "the most astonishing fact in the history of American higher education. . . . Far from being an educational problem, the veteran has become an asset to higher education."[46] In 1949, *Fortune* magazine called the Class of 1949 the "best, . . . most mature, . . . most responsible, . . . [and] self-disciplined" in the history of higher education. *Life* magazine praised Harvard's veterans as the "the best in Harvard's history." James Conant the Harvard president who initially expressed doubts about the potential of veterans as students described them as "the most mature and promising students Harvard has ever had."[47] Several factors contributed to the quality of veterans as students, including their

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[44] Quoted in Kenneth Starr, *Discarded Army: The Nader Report on Vietnam Veterans and the Veterans Administration* (New York: Charterhouse, 1973), 234.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Came True: The G.I. Bill and the Making of Modern America* (Washington and London: Brassey's, 1996), 245.

[47] Quoted in Olson, *G.I. Bill.*

age, level of maturity, and the perspective on life they had gained from military service. Living through the horrors of war led many to eschew traditional hi jinx of campus life and as a group veterans tended to be far more focused and dedicated to their studies than their non-veteran peers.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the education community geared up for another massive influx of veterans under the Vietnam era G.I. Bills. But this time, academics offered far less public debate over the potential impact of this new cadre of veterans on higher education and offered far fewer frightening statements on their potential quality as students. Few expected the Vietnam era bills to have the same dramatic impact on higher education than the original G.I. Bill. By 1960s, higher education was already democratized and an established part of the lives of far more Americans than it had been in 1944. By the 1970s, the later G.I. Bills represented just one more in an ever-expanding list of post-Great Society sources of federal funding to higher education. Likewise, the returning veterans constituted a much smaller percentage of the nation's college level students and so would likely require less specialized attention. Tim O'Brien took a more cynical view of the lack of academic attention to returning veterans, commenting, "Perhaps the educators' silence is rooted in fear. After all, who wants a swarm of smelly junkie-wierdo-killer freaks invading their serene campuses?"[48]

The Veterans Administration attempted to warn educators of the potential problems they might encounter when the veterans returned to school. In an April 1972 commentary in the *Journal of Higher Education*, VA officials E. Robert Stephens and Charles A. Stenger wrote of "The Opportunity and Challenge of the Vietnam Era Veteran

[48] Tim O'Brien, "The Vietnam Veteran," *Penthouse*, November 1974, 78.

to American Educators."[49] Stephens and Stenger noted that the veteran presence could easily be overlooked because they did not return *en masse* as did the World War II veteran. Based on a 1970 survey of the interaction between VA facilities and Vietnam veterans, the authors highlighted five distinct characteristics of Vietnam veterans of which educators ought to be aware when dealing with them in the classroom. Each one suggested that the Vietnam veteran might make a rather volatile classmate. The characteristics included:

-The young veteran is less willing than earlier veterans to accept authority in a compliant manner.
-An expectation that authority in any form will be unresponsive to his intense desire to be treated as an individual.
-A general sense of uncertainty and pessimism toward the future with a resultant greater concentration in immediate gratification.
-An intense, positive identification with his own age group that is more than the typical sharing of common interests and activities.
-A tendency to exercise less control over emotions and feelings and to react with impatience and impulsivity.

The commentary went on to suggest that although many students suffer from similar dispositions, military service, especially service in Vietnam "adds a special type of reality experience" that can lead to alienation "doubts and fears about the worth of society and the meaning of life that he had earlier shared with others his age."[50]

The 1973 VA report on veteran funding, conducted by the Education Testing Service (ETS) of New Jersey, also carried a warning of how military service might manifest itself differently in the Vietnam veteran than the World War II veteran. The

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[49] E. Robert Stephens and Charles A. Stenger, "The Opportunity and Challenge of the Vietnam Era Veteran to American Educators," *Journal of Higher Education* Volume 43, No. 4 (April 1972), 303-307.

[50] Ibid., 304-305.

ETS suggested that the World War II veteran retuned home with a more conservative devotion to their country and their family and with their religious faith reaffirmed by their experience. The Vietnam veteran, the report cautioned, had a greater propensity toward "deep-seated psychological damage" and a far weaker devotion to their country or their family and were generally unsure of their position in society.[51] The warnings of the VA and the ETS suggested that Vietnam veterans would face difficulties fitting in on campus. No doubt, some veterans found returning to school difficult because of their service. When Mike Robinson, a medical officer attached to an artillery battalion, returned to school he discovered "I couldn't relate to the young people. Some things I believed in—they were all against. There were several instances in which I was ready to fight." Despite such differences in outlook, Vietnam veterans never became the "smelly junkie-wierdo-killer freaks" some may have feared.

Military experience invariably has a profound effect on most veterans, but for the Vietnam veteran returning to school the effect was not always negative. Because of their years of military service, Vietnam veterans were likely to be several years older than their fellow students, more likely to be married, and probably more eager to finish their studies to make up for lost time. This extra level of maturity often manifested itself in a positive way because when the Vietnam veteran did return to the classroom, many brought with them the same positive qualities displayed by World War II veterans. Despite his difficulties relating to some students, Robinson found "With the maturing I had done, plus the military service—the exposure to life—I felt I was ready for college." John Finneran, a former helicopter pilot in Vietnam, remembered steering clear of "the kids" at

[51] *ETS Report*, 75-88.

college who seemed more interested in the frivolities of campus life and less concerned with studying.[52]

The 1980 Louis Harris and Associates poll confirmed the high level of maturity displayed by returning veterans. The educators surveyed in the poll placed the quality and commitment of Vietnam veterans as higher than their peers. Sixty-one percent of those polled stated that Vietnam veterans displayed more "emotional maturity" than other students in their classes.[53] Twenty nine percent placed them "About The Same" while only 6 percent considered veterans less mature than their peers. Forty-eight percent considered veterans more "conscientious about their coursework," only 8 percent considered them worse.[54] Vietnam veterans had higher grades and rated higher than their peers in "Seriousness with which they take their coursework," "knowing what they want out of life," "Prospects for completing the program," "Motivation to learn," and "Commitment to education." In all categories less than 11 percent of respondents regarded Vietnam veterans as worse than non-veterans in terms of classroom performance. The only area of classroom performance where veterans scored worse then their non-veteran peers was—as the VA had warned—their "Tolerance for unpopular ideas." By these accounts, Vietnam veterans came home and not only went to school, but went to school and excelled in the classroom. Many veterans had taken a long time to return to school, but when they did, like their World War II predecessors, they became some of the best students of their generation.

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[52] Quoted in Shea, "Back to School," *Source Material On the Vietnam Veteran,* 320-322.

[53] *Myths and Realities*, 181.

[54] Ibid.

Conclusion

THE PROBLEMS AND PROMISE OF THE VIETNAM ERA G.I. BILLS

By the time Vietnam era G.I. Bills had run their course, more veterans had gone to school under them than under any previous veterans' education program. By the passage of the final benefits increase in 1984, the Veterans Administration claimed that 72 percent of Vietnam era veterans had claimed their education benefits with more than half training at the college level. Even more veterans trickled into college after 1984 until the program finally expired on December 31, 1989. The costs to the government of the program were enormous.[1] Judged by these raw numbers alone, the Vietnam bills seem to have been highly successful, but these numbers masked some real problems that continued to compromise the program's effectiveness right up until its demise. Although every veteran had access to benefits, as long as the government failed to pay tuition directly to institutions, not every veteran could afford to attend the school of their choice without some extra funds. How much additional income a veteran could rely on dictated the type of school they attended and ultimately the quality of education they obtained. Where a veteran lived continued to affect the quality of education they could afford. Veterans' education benefits went much further in some states than in others. Some veterans could afford to go to school without much financial worry if they lived in a state with lower tuition rates and chose their school wisely. Those that lived in higher tuition states or who had other obligations such as dependants tended to have to find additional

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[1] *Veterans' Administration Annual Report, 1984* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 81.

work just to make ends meet. Of course, many civilian students faced similar financial struggles, and the G.I. Bill did at least give a considerable boost to the veteran's income. But it did not always cover the entire costs of every veteran's education in the same way the original 1944 bill had done.

Attempts to ascertain exactly what the G.I. Bill meant to the life course of Vietnam and Vietnam era veterans have raised some contradictory conclusions. In March 1979, the *New York Times* lauded what it termed the "Successful Vet" in reference to the Vietnam veterans who returned home from Southeast Asia and reintegrated with ease back into civilian life. The editorial stated, "Despite the hostile political and economic climate in which they returned, Vietnam veterans as a group became remarkably productive civilians." Citing the claims of Max Cleland, head of the Veterans Administration, the *Times* suggested that the Vietnam veterans "are better educated than their World War II and Korean predecessors—having taken greater advantage of the G.I. Bill—and their family incomes are higher than those who avoided service."[2] In contrast to the stereotype of the maladjusted veteran, the *Times* suggested that most Vietnam veterans—in part because of the G.I. Bill—returned to successful lives.

VA figures seem to confirm this suggestion that the G.I. Bill helped Vietnam era veterans catch up and even surpass their non-veteran peers. The 1984 *Veterans Administration Annual Report* revealed that Vietnam era veterans had attained an average education level of 13.2 years compared with 12.9 years for non-veterans. As the report notes, "greater educational attainment results, almost without exception, increased

[2] *New York Times*, March 30, 1979, 22.

earnings." Indeed, the median earnings for male Vietnam era veterans reached 21,670 dollars a year, compared with 18,730 dollars for non-veterans. Significantly, the report also found that Vietnam era veterans had attained a slightly higher level of college degrees than their non-veteran counterparts. According to the VA, 24.4 percent of Vietnam era veterans possessed a college degree by 1984 compared with 24.2 percent of non-veterans in the same age group. Again, if the purpose of the G.I. Bill was to allow veterans to catch up from time lost to civilian life, the bill would appear to have done its job. Additionally, if one considers that many who avoided military service in the 1960s and 1970s fled to college to avoid the draft, one might have expected non-veterans to have higher levels of college training. They did not.[3]

The Veteran Administration figures did not distinguish between those veterans that had served in the Vietnam and those stationed elsewhere during the Vietnam era. Given the additional psychological and physical strain of serving in a combat zone one might reasonably expect some variation in the education levels of Vietnam veterans and Vietnam era veterans. However, in one of the few studies that address this issue, Josefina Card's *Lives After Vietnam: The Personal Impact of Military Service* (1983), found no significant differences in the educational attainment of Vietnam theater veterans and non-Vietnam theater veterans.[4] Card's study did reveal, however, differences in the kinds of education the veterans received. The study examined the life course of 500 civilians, Vietnam veterans and non-Vietnam veterans all of whom finished high school in 1963.

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[3] *Veterans Administration Annual Report, 1984* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), 81-82.

[4] Josefina J. Card, *Lives After Vietnam: Personal Impact of Military Service* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1983).

The differences between the three groups were noticeable but not considerable. Over 32 percent of non-veterans had completed a college degree compared to 28 percent of non-Vietnam veterans and 26 percent of Vietnam veterans. Both Vietnam and non-Vietnam veterans were much more likely to have attained a vocational or less than four-year degree. Among the Vietnam veterans, 23.3 percent had completed a vocational degree compared with 21.7 percent of Vietnam era veterans and only 11.5 percent of non-veterans.[5]

Similarly, Sharon Cohany's more recent study "The Vietnam-era Cohort: Employment and Earnings" suggests that while Vietnam veterans and Vietnam era veterans have gone to college in greater numbers than their non-veteran peers, proportionally more have attained only one to three years of college training compared with non-veterans. Cohany claims that 23 percent of Vietnam veterans have four or more years of college compared with 29 percent of Vietnam era veterans and 31 percent of non-veterans. However, 29 percent of Vietnam veterans and 26 percent of non-Vietnam veterans had between one and three years of schooling.[6] The higher number of veterans obtaining lower level degrees or training might result from the fact that the G.I. Bill benefits would probably have covered all of a veteran's education expenses in these lower cost programs. But even under the generous 1944 bill, many more veterans preferred vocational training to higher education raising the possibility that veterans might be more attracted to training or shorter-term courses so they can reenter the

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[5] Ibid., 39.

[6] Sharon Cohany, "The Vietnam-era Cohort: Employment and Earnings" *Monthly Labor Review,* 1992, 115 (6): 3-15.

workforce more quickly. Many may also have chosen vocational schools to develop the practical skills they learned in the military.

Card's study found other variations in veterans' education attainment. Not every eligible veteran used their G.I. Bill entitlements, but those who did attained a higher "average academic aptitude score," greater "socioeconomic status," and completed roughly 1.5 years additional education. These figures reveal the G.I. Bill's potentially positive impact on veterans' readjustment. The study also reveals variations in education resulting from branch of service. Air force veterans are more likely to have the highest education level, followed by the navy, army, and marines. These differences most likely result from the more specialized training air force and navy personnel tend to require for their service.[7]

Several more recent studies have placed further qualifiers on the success of the Vietnam era bills. In contrast to the VA figures, Joshua Angrist, in two articles written in the early 1990s, suggests that white Vietnam era veterans have earned 15 percent less than their non-veteran counterparts ten years after service.[8] Other studies have found similar results; several articles by Jere Cohen, David Segal, and Lloyd Temme claim that Vietnam era veterans have not achieved the same educational and employment levels as non-veterans.[9] They suggest that employer discrimination accounts in part for this

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[7] Ibid., 56.

[8] Joshua D. Angrist, "Lifelong Earnings and the Vietnam Era Draft Lottery: Evidence from Social Security Records," *American Economic Review,* 1990, 8 (3): 313-336, and "The Effect of Veterans Benefits on Education and Earnings," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 1993, 46 (4): 637-652.

[9] Jere Cohen, David Segal, and Lloyd V. Temme, "Military Service Was an Educational Disadvantage to Vietnam–Era Personnel," *Sociology and Social Research,* 1986, 70(3): 206-208 and "The Impact of Education on Vietnam-Era Veterans'

deficiency. This claim is tenuous at best because veterans had preferential treatment in government jobs and surveys, such as those conducted by Louis Harris and Associates in 1971 and 1980, repeatedly show that employees had no problem with veteran status. The government also encouraged companies to actively recruit Vietnam veterans.

Given the discrepancies between the VA statistics and some of these other studies, ascertaining the exact impact of the G.I. Bill on the lives of veterans remains elusive. The scope of this project, however, is not to ascertain the effectiveness of the programs, but merely to provide a context in which to understand why the Vietnam legislation had its distinct and controversial character. By doing so, this project provides a starting point for a more dispassionate and objective understanding of the Vietnam era bills and what they reveal about the veteran homecoming experience and the often heard claim that the government stabbed its veterans in the back. Clearly, the Vietnam era G.I. Bills did have problems, especially in the early years following the passage of the 1966 bill. The initial low benefits reflected the fact that the government, for the first time in its history, decided to offer wide-ranging benefits to peacetime veterans. Because of what seemed at the time a generous offer to all veterans, those that faced fire in Vietnam, those that would suffer from readjustment problems, found their benefits to be far less than those offered veterans of previous wars. The 1966 bill made no distinction between a veteran that fought in the jungles of Vietnam or flew bomber missions over Hanoi and those veterans that drove a truck in Germany or who guarded a base in Georgia. For the veteran that never faced a combat situation, the benefits represented a reasonable reward

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Occupational Attainment," *Social Science Quarterly,* 1992, 73(2): 397-409. See also Peter Matilla, "G.I. Bill Benefits and Enrollments: How did Vietnam Veterans Fare?" *Social Science Quarterly* 1978 59(3): 535-545.

for sacrifice. As the Bradley Commission and previous generations of politicians had often argued, the government owed fewer obligations to those veterans that never suffered any physical or mental harm from military service. But the 1966 bill changed the equation and changed the nature of military service in the United States. Because the bill made no distinctions in type of service, many Vietnam veterans that might have hoped for a generous education benefits package to help them get on with their lives found that they had to find additional work or alternative funds to supplement their income. The irony of the 1966 bill is that because the government decided to be more generous than at any other time in its history in lavishing benefits on veterans that previous centuries of government had deemed unworthy, those veterans that were the most worthy—those that had suffered as much if not more than any other generation of veterans—did not receive the support their sacrifices deserved.

Ralph Yarborough began his push for a peacetime G.I. Bill long before hostilities in Vietnam became full blown. He had the best interests of the veteran at heart when he attempted to provide them with benefits that would reward them for time lost from civilian life. Although he won a victory in 1966, the amount of benefits offered never reached the levels he sought. In part, the low benefits resulted from Lyndon Johnson's attempts to pass universal education benefits as a cornerstone of his Great Society. Drawing on the ideological precedents established by Franklin Roosevelt, Johnson did not want to enlarge the specialized status of veterans at a time when so many other sectors of society demanded greater federal investment. Not wanting to siphon off any more money than was absolutely necessary from other social programs, Johnson sought to keep benefits low. He had a willing ally in his fight in the form of fellow Texan Olin

Teague in the House. The Texas triumvirate of Yarborough, Johnson, and Teague drew the battle lines for the political battles to increase benefits that lay ahead. The Senate continued to fight for higher benefits, the White House remained obstinate, and the House trod a middle path.

Once the problems of the 1966 bill became evident, the Senate pushed hard for increases that would have given Vietnam veterans more equitable benefits. But when Richard Nixon became president, he continued to seek ways of limiting the amount of benefits offered. Nixon acted not out of any great social vision or ideological conviction, but more from a desire to limit federal spending at a time when the economy faced its first significant downturn since the Great Depression. Despite continuing to praise veterans in public, Nixon clearly believed that there were limits to what the government owed them. Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford went further in capping the government's largesse by becoming the first president to ever veto a veterans education benefits package, the 1974 G.I. Bill. Congress overrode his veto by a crushing margin, a testimony to bipartisan desire on Capitol Hill to rectify the problems with the 1966 bill.

Without question, the government did a lot for Vietnam veterans. It never did turn its back on them. The Senate in particular fought hard to give veterans a generous reward for their service. But because of ideological or economic convictions in the White House, the Vietnam bills did not offer all veterans the same quality of education that the World War II veteran could afford. Whatever the costs, the government could and probably should have done more to ensure more equitable benefits for every Vietnam veteran. Despite their failings, the Vietnam era bills certainly did more good than harm. They did provide millions with an opportunity to better their lives access to higher

education. Even though the bills did not cover every veteran's education cost fully, they did provide every veteran with a welcome boost in their education funds and undoubtedly allowed many to graduate debt-free. Many could, and did, receive a quality education if they chose their schools carefully. As the high participation rates in the program reveal, the Vietnam and Vietnam era veterans welcomed the benefits.

Nearly three out of every four Vietnam and Vietnam era veterans used their education benefits in some capacity. As newer studies begin to reexamine the Vietnam veteran experience, the G.I. Bill needs to be incorporated more fully into the narrative. Most went to school after returning home and did not end up on the streets or with rifles in bell towers. There was and is a "silent majority" of Vietnam veterans that came home and reintegrated back into society with little trouble. They did not attract the attention of the media, or Oliver Stone, or *60 Minutes*. Former Secretary of State and Vietnam veteran Colin Powell said recently that Vietnam veterans, "Have done just fine . . . most were able to return home and get on with their lives." Senator John McCain adds, "The overwhelming majority went over, served their country, came home and resumed their lives."[10] The G.I. Bill played a significant role in helping these veterans get on with their lives. Stories of veterans going to school may not be particularly sexy, but they may be more representative of the homecoming experience of the Vietnam veteran than the Hollywood and media archetypes. These stories need to be told.

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[10]Quoted in a *USA Today* Article, November 16, 2000 reprinted in "Welcome Home," newsletter of the Kettle Moraine, Wisconsin chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America, May 2001.

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