

proportional amount for less than full-time enrollment), and (d) repeal the current \$1,200 reduction-in-pay to be eligible for the benefit. Each individual would be eligible for 36 months (4 academic years) of benefits.

Our goal in introducing H.R. 1182 is twofold. First, when high school students consider their post-high school plans, we want them to consider military service as their first option, not their last. It is no wonder the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard are experiencing major recruitment problems. Most college-bound youth and their parents see a tour of military service as a detour from their college plans, not as a way to achieve that goal. We want to reverse that way of thinking.

Second, we want to empower the youth of America—our future veterans—with a GI Bill that would be limited only by their aspirations, initiative, and abilities. We want a GI Bill that would allow a young person to be able to afford any educational institution in America to which that individual could competitively gain admittance.

Our legislation is inspired by, and is substantively very similar to, a recommendation made in the comprehensive January 14, 1999, report of the Congressional Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance, chaired by Anthony J. Principi.

As we look to the future, I believe it's instructive to glance at our past. As my colleagues are aware, 55 years ago the Congress sent to President Roosevelt's desk a piece of legislation that truly transformed our Nation—arguably the greatest domestic legislation since the Homestead Act. Legislation that is popularly known as the GI Bill of Rights. The World War II GI Bill was one of the boldest investments our Nation has ever made. It was certainly one of Congress' finest hours, because World War II veteran-students did not just pass through the American system of higher education, they transformed it. That legislation, and those veteran-students, created today's leaders and the modern middle class.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot recount how many times in my 22 years here that a Member of this body has said he probably would not be here today if it were not for the World War II GI Bill. Our proposal to return to a World War II-type GI Bill is not about a program of the past, it's about empowerment for the future. Has society, and our values, changed so dramatically that a revered education program that was so successful 55 years ago no longer applies to today's servicemembers?

For 223 years, military service has been our Nation's most fundamental form of National Service. When we talk about education policy in this country, I think our starting point is that we owe more to those who voluntarily have worn the uniform because they have earned more by virtue of their years of service. The fundamental difference between the GI Bill that we propose and other meritorious Federal student financial aid programs is that ours is truly earned.

About 60 percent of active duty servicemembers are married when they separate from the military, and many have children. They find out quickly that the gulf between the purchasing power under the Montgomery GI Bill and current education costs is indeed a large one. Today's Montgomery GI Bill, properly named for our distinguished former colleague who worked indefatigably on the legis-

lation for almost 7 years prior to its enactment, unfortunately falls short by \$6,007 annually in paying tuition, room and board, fees, books, and transportation at public institutions, and \$15,251 at private institutions. Veterans deserve better. And I note the cost figures I cite are for 1996—the most recent data available.

Through fiscal year 1997, some 13 years after the enactment of the Montgomery GI Bill test program, only 48.7 percent of veterans have utilized it. Conversely, between 1966 and 1976, 63.6 percent of Vietnam-era veterans used their education benefits.

We need a GI Bill that harnesses the unique resource that veterans represent. We want to accelerate, not delay, their entry into the civilian work force. We need a GI Bill that rewards veterans for faithful service and that makes it more likely that they will serve among the ranks of the country's future leaders and opinion shapers.

What better investment can we make in the youth of this country? A GI Bill that would be limited only by the aspirations, initiative, and abilities of the young man or woman involved. A GI Bill that largely would allow a young person to afford any educational institution in America to which that individual could competitively gain admittance. What a powerful message to send across America. What an emphatic statement to send to working and middle class families who go into great debt to finance their children's higher education because they are told they make too much money to qualify for Federal or State grants.

In closing, I submit to my colleagues that why my cosponsors and I are proposing is not just about an education program that we believe would serve as our best military recruitment incentive ever for the All-Volunteer Force; or after their service provide unfettered access to higher education at the best schools; or provide unbounded opportunity for our youth that cuts across social, economic, ethnic, and racial lines. What we have proposed is what is best for America.

I believe the notion of service to our Nation, service in an All-Volunteer Force, and the corresponding opportunity for all of us to participate in our great economic system sustained by that service, is a core value we simply must pass on to the next generation. It is a core value we can neglect, but only at our own peril.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members of the House to join me in support of H.R. 1182.

THE VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER  
EQUIPMENT ENHANCEMENT ACT  
OF 1999

**HON. SAM GEJDENSON**

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, March 23, 1999*

Mr. GEJDENSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise, along with Mr. ENGLISH from Pennsylvania, to introduce the Volunteer Firefighter Equipment Enhancement Act of 1999.

Communities in my district and around the nation rely on volunteer firefighters to protect lives and property day in and day out. My district includes 54 towns, and there are 91 volunteer fire departments. These brave men and women leave their jobs and get up in the middle of the night to battle fires, respond to auto

accidents, and provide a wide range of other emergency services. These services would not be available without these volunteers. We must do as much as we can to help our firefighters as they put their lives at risk to help people in their communities.

Many of our nation's volunteer firefighters companies have taken on tasks far beyond firefighting. Years ago, volunteer companies could fulfill their mission with one pumper truck and a few ladders. Today, as we ask our volunteers to take on more and more tasks, they need much more equipment. However, our tax laws have not kept up with the changing demands.

Section 150 (e)(1) of the tax code states: "A bond of a volunteer fire department shall be treated as a bond of a political subdivision of a state if \* \* \* such bond is issued as part of an issue 95 percent or more of the net proceeds of which are to be used for the acquisition construction, reconstruction, or improvement of a firehouse \* \* \* or firetruck used or to be used by such department."

The law only allows volunteer fire departments to use the benefits of municipal bonding if the department is building a fire station or buying a firetruck. They cannot issue bonds to buy ambulances, rescue trucks or other emergency response vehicles which are critical to protecting citizens across our nation.

The legislation that Representative ENGLISH and I are introducing today would simply change this provision by striking the phrase "or firetruck" and inserting "firetruck, ambulance or other emergency response vehicle." It is a simple change in law that will help volunteer fire companies acquire the tools they need to carry out their expanded mission. The bill would also extend the tax treatment that volunteer fire companies receive to volunteer ambulance companies.

I believe that if we are going to ask our volunteers to take on these additional burdens, we must help them obtain the equipment they need.

This is a small first step in the United States recognizing volunteer firefighters as the heroes that they are. Unpaid, but not underappreciated, we have much more to do to help firefighters, but this will be a good first step.

COLUMNIST DENNIS ROGERS ON  
THE PLIGHT OF TOBACCO FARMERS

**HON. BOB ETHERIDGE**

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, March 23, 1999*

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I grew up on a tobacco farm, and I continue to grow tobacco today. Higher federal taxes and litigation by the states have severely altered the market for tobacco and have led to income losses of thirty five percent for tobacco farmers in the past two years alone. The actions that have led to this point have been taken in retaliation against the industry and its practices, but the harm has been felt on the farm. Tobacco farmers need help.

Since coming to the House two years ago, I have tried to articulate to Congress the plight tobacco farmers are in as a result the ongoing tobacco wars. Earlier this month, Dennis Rogers, a columnist with The News and Observer