cost $46,874 a year. Our average veteran coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan is able to receive about $6,000 a year under this Montgomery GI bill that is in place. That is about 12.8 percent of what it would take for our veterans today to be able to go to Columbia.

Senator WARNER, my senior colleague from Virginia, was able to take advantage of two GI bills. He was able to go to Washington and Lee University for his undergraduate degree, and then he was able to go to the University of Virginia Law School—full boat. Today, the Montgomery GI bill would pay about 14 percent of what it would take to go to the Washington and Lee University, and about 13 percent of what it would take to go to the UVA Law School.

I emphasize that I am standing here as a full beneficiary of Uncle Sam. After I was wounded in Vietnam and left the Marine Corps, I was able to go to Georgetown Law School, with my tuition paid for, my books bought, and a monthly stipend. Today's Montgomery GI bill would pay about 11.6 percent of that.

I think it is time for all of us in the political process, who like to use the words of praise—rightfully earned by the people on these battlefields—to talk the talk and then walk the walk. Let's get them a GI bill that truly allows them a first-class future. We have a majority—an overwhelming majority—of my Senate colleagues on the Democratic side who are cosponsors of this legislation. I am truly hopeful people on the other side of the aisle will understand this is not a political measure; it is a measure of respect, and it is an earned benefit.

We are giving this year $18.2 billion worth of educational grants to people in this country purely based on their economic status. Certainly we can afford to pay for a meaningful GI bill for these young men and women who have been serving since 9/11.

The senior Senator from Alaska mentioned, during the Christmas break, that we are spending approximately $15 billion a month in Iraq and Afghanistan. We could fund this GI bill for 1 week of what it would cost for us to run the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unlike a lot of other comparisons that are made on this floor, this is a direct comparison because a GI bill is a cost of war.

I urge my colleagues to get behind it. Let's get this done early in this session before we go into the political season, and get these young men and women the benefits they not only deserve but they have earned.

COMMISSION ON WARTIME CONTRACTING

Mr. WEBB. Mr. President, the second issue I wish to mention today regards the National Defense Authorization Act, which the President signed into law yesterday. In that act was a commission on wartime contracting, which Senator MCCASKILL and I jointly introduced last year and were able to get embodied in the National Defense Authorization Act.

This is a very important piece of legislation. It will put into place an independent, bipartisan commission that has a 2-year sunset date on it—jointly picked, jointly selected by Democrats and Republicans in the Senate and in the House and from the administration—a commission filled with experts, not Senators sitting around or political people sitting around, to examine the wartime contracting that has taken place since our invasion of Iraq, particularly, also looking at Afghanistan, and trying to bring accountability to the broad range of fraud, waste, and abuse that we all know has occurred during that period.

Now, to my surprise, when the President signed this legislation yesterday, he issued a signing statement along with it saying this, with respect to this wartime contracting commission, that:

> This wartime contracting commission purports to impose requirements that could inhibit the President's ability to carry out his constitutional obligations to take care that the laws be faithfully executed to protect national security, to supervise the executive branch, and to execute his authority as Commander in Chief.

He goes on to say that:

> The executive branch shall construe such provisions in a manner consistent with the constitutional authority of the President.

In other words, the President of the United States, who has been in charge of the conduct of this war, and whose administration has been in charge of executing these contracts—supervising them, making sure that they meet the requirements of fairness in the law, is now saying that he believes a legislative body can enact a law that he can choose to ignore basically because he says it would interfere with his responsibility as Commander in Chief to supervise a war. I am totally at a loss. I am totally amazed to see this kind of language as it respects this legislation.

The Commission was put into place with broad bipartisan support and bicameral support by both the House and the Senate, the idea being to study systemic problems—the same sorts of things this President, I would think, would want to root out. Its historic precedent comes from the Truman Committee that took place during World War II, when then-Senator Harry Truman wanted to look at wartime fraud, waste, and abuse so we could get a proper handle on the Federal spending that was going into mobilization and into the projects that were being put on line during World War II. We certainly didn't see President Franklin Roosevelt trying to say the Truman Committee's work was going to interfere with his ability to conduct World War II. To the contrary, the President, during that war, saw this was the type of thing he needed in order to bring the right sort of supervision and the right sort of accountability that might eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse.

So we don't quite know what the administration intends with this sort of language, but I want all my colleagues to be aware of it and to be aware that it potentially is an impingement on the rights of the legislative body, in effect saying the President has the authority to ignore a law that has now passed, a law he has now signed.

So we are going to go forward with this Commission. We are going to work with the administration, we hope, to set it up. We are going to move as rapidly as we can because the clock is ticking in terms of statute of limitations on some of the charges that might be filed. I hope the people of this country understand we want to do this for the good of the American people; that we have a responsibility to make sure the Nation's purse strings have been properly taken care of and that we are acting as the stewards of America's taxpayers.

Again, if someone in the administration would like to explain to us what their constitutional issue is with a piece of legislation the President has signed, we would be happy to hear that. In the meantime, we are moving forward with this Commission. It is vitally important to accountability in the Government. I am very proud to have been a sponsor of it, and we are marching forward.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan is recognized.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed for 5 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, first, let me commend Senator WEBB for the leadership on the issue he talked about. I am going to speak very briefly on that same issue—the signing of the statement by the President yesterday—but before I do that, I wish to commend him and the other sponsors of this legislation. It is critically needed. It is long overdue. But for the leadership of Senator WEBB and a few other Senators, we would not have had that provision in the bill which was finally signed yesterday.

Yesterday, the President did sign into law the National Defense Authorization Act, which is essentially the same bill the President vetoed last month. In his signing statement, the President identified a few provisions of the act and stated that they:

> Purport to impose requirements that could inhibit the President's ability to carry out his constitutional obligations.

The President's statement went on to say that:

> The executive branch shall construe such provisions in a manner consistent with the constitutional authority of the President.

The specific provisions the President cited relate to a commission to study