

March 23, 1999

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 legislation 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.

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

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.

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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 of the ongoing tobacco wars. Earlier this month, Dennis Rogers, a columnist with The News and Observer daily newspaper in Raleigh, North Carolina, wrote an excellent essay on the position tobacco farmers find themselves in 1999. Mr. Speaker, I request that Mr. Rogers' article be placed at this point in the RECORD, and I hope it will provide guidance to us all as we debate issues related to tobacco in the future. Congress can benefit greatly from the clear-eyed perspective of this insightful North Carolinian whose feet are planted firmly on the ground.

[From the News & Observer, Mar. 3, 1999]

IT'S NOT GREED, BUT DESPERATION

(By Dennis Rogers)

The numbers are so obscenely large as to be meaningless: There is \$4.6 billion to be paid by the tobacco industry to the state of North Carolina over 25 years. There is \$1.97 billion for a trust fund to be spread among the state's tobacco farmers over the next 12 years.

But regardless of how much money tobacco farmers eventually get, if any, what are they supposed to do then?

Unless you're a farmer, you probably don't care. You've made it clear in your e-mails and phone calls that many of you think tobacco farmers are whiners trying to hang on to a dying business. Nobody guarantees me a living, you've cynically said, so why should we do it for them?

But unlike you, I've heard from the farmers, too, strong men and women who are scared about their futures. It is enough to break your heart.

What they talk about most is not the money, but losing their souls, their culture, their foundation and their heritage. They talk about the land their ancestors entrusted to their care and the shame they would feel in losing it.

They talk about wanting to give their children the chance they had, to stand under a hot Carolina sun and feel your own land beneath your feet, the same land that once nurtured the old folks buried in the church cemetery just down the road.

"What am I going to do if I stop farming?" asked Johnston County's John Talbot as we rode in Monday's protest through the streets of Raleigh. "I'm 45 years old. Who is going to hire me?"

Who, indeed? If the tobacco farmers of Eastern North Carolina stop farming, what will become of them? A rootless corporate