

OFFICE OF THE
UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE,
Washington, DC, March 20, 2008.

Hon. DANIEL K. AKAKA,
Chairman, Committee on Veterans Affairs, U.S.
Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: This letter serves as the annual report on entitlement transfers of basic educational assistance to eligible dependents under the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) as required by Section 3020(1) of title 38, United States Code.

The Army implemented a pilot program in July 2006, allowing Soldiers, who reenlist in critical skills, the ability to transfer MGIB benefits to their spouse. The Army defined critical skills as any Soldier who qualified for a Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) incentive and was entitled to a Zone B or Zone C bonus under current messages at the time of their reenlistment. This SRB is reduced by an amount equal to the actuarial per capita cost. These payments were then deposited into the DoD Education Benefit Fund for transfer to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In Fiscal Year 2007, 296 Soldiers chose this option, or less than 2 percent of the over 17K Soldiers eligible upon reenlistment. Of the 296 Soldiers, the majority were mid-career Soldiers (SGT/SSG) assigned to U.S. Forces Command and U.S. Special Operations Command. Initial feedback from the field indicates that Soldiers want to be able to transfer benefits to all their dependents, including children. The Army extended the program to allow eligibility for both spouses and children in November 2007.

None of the other Services exercised their MGIB transferability authority and, instead, relied on traditional reenlistment/retention incentives. In spite of the fact that this program was not offered by those Services, each experienced a successful retention year in Fiscal Year 2007. However, all the Services are closely watching the results of the Army pilot and continue to retain the authority to include MGIB transferability in their retention programs should circumstances warrant.

The Department plans to include the expansion of MGIB transferability in its Fiscal Year 2009 legislative proposal. This expansion will support the President's State of the Union address, where he called for Congress to join him in "allowing our troops to transfer their unused education benefits to their spouses or children."

I trust that this report will prove useful in your consideration of Defense personnel programs. Similar letters have been sent to the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Committee on Armed Services, and the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL L. DOMINGUEZ,
Principal Deputy.

Madam President, I yield the floor.
The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period for the transaction of morning business and that Senators be allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Vermont is recognized for 10 minutes.

ENERGY PRICES

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I concur with a lot of what my colleague from North Dakota said, and I applaud his leadership on this whole issue of outrageously high energy prices.

A few weeks ago, I sent an e-mail out to constituents in the State of Vermont, and essentially I said: Please write back to me and tell me what these outrageously high gas prices and oil prices mean to you. How are they impacting your lives?

From our very small State of 630,000 people, we received, as of this date, some 900 responses. Nine hundred families wrote to me to tell me the impact these extraordinarily high gas and oil prices are having in Vermont.

As you know, Vermont is doubly hit by these high prices because we are a rural State and people have to travel long distances to get to work, to get to the doctor, to get to the grocery store, and with the weather sometimes at 30 below zero, people spend a lot of money heating their homes. Madam President, \$4-plus a gallon for home heating oil has a huge impact on their lives.

What I would like to do in the time I have is simply read some of the e-mails I have recently received from Vermont. Let me be very clear in saying that while the e-mails came from Vermont, these e-mails speak for millions of people throughout this country, perhaps especially in rural areas. It is just amazing that at a time when poverty is increasing and the middle class is collapsing these high gas and oil prices have just taken many people over the edge. We are hearing what their stories are about.

As I have said on many occasions, I think we in the Congress are far too separated and isolated from the reality of American life. We are surrounded by a ring of well-paid lobbyists representing large, powerful multinational corporations, and the voices of the people do not ring out as clearly as they should in the Senate. Today I want to allow some of those voices to be heard.

Let me start off with somebody from the southwestern part of the State of Vermont. This is what this person writes:

I retired to this community on a fixed income, and now the price of gas almost prohibits me from having any enjoyment. I have to factor in the price of gas for everything I do. Most of my medical appointments are at least 50 miles round-trip, and the cost of gas is absolutely prohibitive. I do not know how working people who earn less than \$10 an hour are able to afford the gas. Something has to happen as this is a crisis not only in Vermont, but throughout the country.

Here you see a story of somebody being impacted because they have to go

to a doctor a considerable distance away.

While we are on that subject, let me read an e-mail that came into Burlington, where our major medical center is. This story is interesting. Again, it tells you one of the side impacts of these outrageously high gas prices—what gas prices are doing. This is from Burlington, VT:

My story involves my capacity as an oncology social worker working with cancer patients in an outpatient clinic. I also run an emergency fund for the cancer support program, which provides funds for cancer patients in need during their cancer journey, including initial diagnosis, surgery, and treatment period in which they experience a significant decrease in income during a medical leave.

These are people dealing with cancer. They cannot go to work. Their incomes are declining. Then she writes:

I cannot describe how devastating it has been for these folks who need to travel great distances to get to and from their cancer treatment and followup care with the way gas prices have been. Many of these folks need to travel on a daily basis to radiation therapy for several weeks, while others come from surrounding counties every 1 to 2 weeks for chemotherapy. It has had a tremendous impact on our ability to provide the financial assistance through our emergency fund to all those in need. Someone with cancer who has to get treatment has no choice how many times they need to travel great distances. They have to have reliable transportation and thus need access to gas for their cars or other family members' cars to get to their treatment and followup care. This is becoming increasingly difficult as gas prices continue to rise and our emergency fund cannot meet all of the financial needs of these patients.

How many people think of that? We all get upset and angry when we pay \$3.79 or \$3.80 for a gallon of gas, but here is a story where this price of gas is impacting the ability in rural States for people to actually get the cancer treatment they need.

Here is another story that comes from northern Vermont:

My commute is 630 miles per week. On average, I drive nearly 900 miles per week. My wife also commutes 250 miles per week. Two years ago, we spent between \$500 to \$600 per month on gas. You don't need an MBA to figure out what we spend a month on gas now. Our mortgage payment is less than the cost of getting to work. How does this hurt all Americans? We spend less on local goods and services. We wait longer to fix problems with our cars. Is this doing further damage to our environment? I need new tires and am scouring the classifieds to find used tires. Is this putting my family at risk? I don't know where this is going to end. How can ExxonMobil possibly make \$40 billion in profits alone? I just hope that supposedly smart people in Washington [i.e., us] will use all the tools in their tool boxes to stop this insanity.

Here is another letter. It comes from northern Vermont again:

This is my opinion. Here in Vermont you know we face challenges to heat our homes and commute to our workplaces. I live in the town of Morrisville, and I travel 78 miles to