
Defense Report

AUSA



If We Are to Have a New GI Bill Education Incentive, It Must Be Truly Valuable

After a series of hearings last year, both the House and the Senate seemed favorably inclined toward instituting a new GI Bill-type education incentive designed to bring a larger number of college-bound young people into the services and to improve our overall ability to cope with the complex of systems that comprise the main lines of our defense. Congress might have moved ahead with an incentive proposal had it not been for a plea by the Department of Defense for enough time to design one of its own.

A few details of that DoD design have begun to surface as the time approaches for its submission to Congress. One of those details is truly alarming because it reflects the department's unwillingness to pay the price of a truly effective incentive. It seems that the Defense Department will propose a benefit with a maximum value of between \$8,000 and \$9,000 for a full term of service, with the expectation that this amount will enable a service member to complete a college course of four nine-month academic years. This amount is obviously inadequate.

The University of Oregon, a state-supported institution with tuition about the same as other state universities across the country, has estimated that an unmarried student, a resident of the state, living in a campus dormitory would pay \$4,374 in tuition, board, room and incidental fees for a nine-month year. If the student is not a legal resident of the state the total cost jumps to \$6,562 per academic year. If the resident student lived at home and commuted to school his annual college-related expenses would amount to \$3,204. In any case the four-year total substantially exceeds the total entitlement envisioned by the Department of Defense.

In fairness, it must be said, too, that the prevalent figure considered by Congress, \$300 per month for the nine months or \$2,700 per academic year, also does not carry the freight. In neither case is there any possibility that the total entitlement could support an education at prestigious private institutions at which tuition and fees are many times greater than at state universities.

What these proposals tell the college-bound men and women is, "Yes, we want you to serve in the uniform of your country, but we don't want you badly enough to make it worth your while."