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# Defense Report

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## **A Peacetime GI Bill—A Return to Prudence in Federal Assistance to Education**

By dispensing about \$10 billion annually in student aid of one form or another, the federal government has created a system of educational benefits which offers more assistance to those citizens who do not serve their country than it does for those who serve. In effect, according to one noted sociologist, "We have created a GI bill without the GI."

By doling out so much money in the form of outright grants, low-cost loans and other forms of student assistance, the Department of Education seems to beg the question: in terms of national priorities, should not federal education dollars first be targeted to those who choose to serve their country? Does it not seem prudent to seek a return on investments of precious taxpayer dollars?

Each of the military services depends on volunteers to maintain force levels. Of far greater importance than mere numbers is the quality of young men and women who volunteer for military service. The need today is for more college-bound young people to operate the complex systems that provide the main sinews of our defense. In the near future an improving economy and reduced numbers of young Americans reaching the age of 17 are expected to have an adverse impact on military recruiting efforts. Business, industry and the armed forces will all be competing for recruits within a shrinking pool of young people. The armed services are going to need some highly effective incentives if they are to compete successfully.

A properly structured educational assistance program can be a powerful recruiting and retention tool for the services. No other program is so well understood and appreciated among American families, and nothing can compare with its drawing power as a recruiting incentive among that quality of American youth so essential to a strong and ready defense force. The GI Bill is one of the most effective, equitable and socially important programs ever devised by the federal government. Congress could combine a return to prudence in federal assistance to education and help to assure the continued vigor of the volunteer armed services by bringing back the old, familiar GI Bill.