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# Defense Report

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## **The Permanent GI Bill is Good—It Could be Made Better**

When he signed the Montgomery GI Bill Act on June 1, President Reagan authorized the nation's first permanent peacetime program of educational benefits for veterans. In doing so, the President had the overwhelming support of Congress—the House voted 401-2 and the Senate 89-0 in favor of making the GI Bill a permanent educational benefit. Then the lawmakers who attended the Rose Garden signing ceremony barely had returned to their Capitol Hill offices when they and military manpower officials began discussing ways to improve the program.

To participate, a recruit must contribute \$100 a month for the first 12 months of his enlistment, a choice he must make within two weeks of entering service. In return for his non-refundable \$1,200 contribution and three years of service, the soldier can receive \$300 monthly for up to 36 months while attending a college or university.

On top of the basic benefit there are some added inducements payable at the discretion of the Secretary of Defense for individuals possessing critical specialties or for longer enlistments.

Among the changes being actively considered in Congress, the two given the best chance for early passage deal with the refundability of a serviceman's contribution—to his survivors or estate in the event the active duty enrollee dies before using the benefits, or to the veteran when exceptional circumstances preclude his attending college.

Two other changes would cost the government little or nothing but would greatly increase the program's practicality and attractiveness. The first would give a recruit more time to make up his mind by permitting enrollment any time during the service member's first year of service. At the same time, the deduction of \$100 a month from a recruit's pay is substantial; it represents about 17 percent of pay before taxes. It would be easier for a new recruit to afford \$50 a month for 24 months.

The Administration and Congress have made a good bill permanent, and, in order to make it better, they should give their whole hearted cooperation to the consideration and adoption of these minor but necessary changes to the one law by which the country can express its appreciation to and support of those who serve.