

# Montgomery GI Bill still vital part of Army benefits

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The Montgomery GI Bill has extended significant educational benefits to thousands of Soldiers who served in the nation's all-volunteer service, and much of this is attributed to one lawmaker who recently died.

The bill is named after retired House Representative Gillespie V. "Sonny" Montgomery.

The GI Bill was Montgomery's outstanding legislative accomplishment, according to Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. Montgomery's death May 12 was seen as the loss of one of America's true patriots and a passionate advocate of the men and women in uniform.

"A decorated veteran of World War II — where he won the Bronze Star for capturing a German machine gun nest — as well as the Korean War, Sonny Montgomery brought his personal experience and expertise in military matters to bear in a lifetime of public service," Rumsfeld said.

Montgomery served for 13 years as chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee and was known as a champion of servicemembers and veterans. One of his biggest achievements was writing the modernized GI Bill that boosted recruiting for the all-volunteer force.

For the active duty part of the pro-



Former Congressmen Gillespie "Sonny" Montgomery is flanked by Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, and Lt. Gen. Roger Schultz, former director of the Army National Guard. Montgomery was 85 when he died May 12.

MASTER SGT. PAUL COOK

gram, benefits generally are for individuals who enter active duty for the first time after June 30, 1985. Participants have their military pay reduced by \$100 a month for the first 12 months of active duty.

To qualify for benefits, the veteran generally must serve two or more years and receive an honorable discharge. Eligible training includes col-

leges, business, technical or vocational schools, participation in apprenticeship or on-job training, correspondence courses and flight training. Maximum benefits are \$400 a month for 36 months. The Defense Department may add a supplemental bonus, called a "kicker," as an incentive for special military duty.

The Bill for reservists is similar,

except a reservist's pay is not reduced. To be eligible, a reservist must sign up for six years of duty in the reserve elements of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or the Army or Air national guards.

Before it was renamed the Montgomery GI Bill, the American Legion was credited with designing the main features of the GI Bill and pushing it through Congress. The Legion overcame objections by other organizations that the proposed bill was too sweeping and could jeopardize veterans getting any help at all.

The Senate approved the final form of the bill June 12, 1944, and the House followed June 13. June 22, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the "Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944," better known as the "GI Bill of Rights," in the presence of five Legionnaires and several members of Congress. At first, the subject of intense debate and parliamentary maneuvering, the famed legislation for veterans of World War II has since been recognized as one of the most important acts of Congress.

During the past five decades, the law has made possible the investment of billions of dollars in education and training for millions of veterans, and the nation has in return earned many times investment in increased taxes and a dramatically changed society.

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