



## Updating our Commitment to Those Who Serve

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

Texans honor our men and women in uniform every day of the year. But formal recognition is concentrated in May. This year, we express our appreciation for military service on May 17, Armed Forces Day, and we honor the fallen on May 26, Memorial Day.

We especially remember the heroism and sacrifice of American troops who served in World War II, which ended in Europe on May 8, 1945, and in the Pacific three months later.

Our current military force is similar to its predecessors in its dedication and determination to preserve our freedom. But in contrast to the past, today's troops are all volunteers. If anything, their willingness to serve our country creates a greater obligation on our part to look after their long-term needs and goals.

Following World War II, the U.S. government created a G.I. Bill to provide educational benefits for the flood of military coming home from wartime duty. Many recipients were drafted immediately after high school, interrupting their education. The G.I. Bill allowed them an opportunity, upon returning from the war, to pick up where they might have been prior to their service.

The men and women who serve today do so by choice, and their circumstances are diverse. As a result, they require a broader range of options. So Congress is currently updating the G.I. Bill to meet the requirements of our modern-day soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines.

I am proud to co-sponsor new legislation that recognizes the vital role that military families play in the support, well-being and careers of our troops. This legislation expands educational benefits for service members and, for the first time, allows benefits to be transferred to their dependents.

In the military, it is known that "we recruit troops, but we retain families." This legislation recognizes the critical role that supportive families play in allowing their troops to accomplish their important missions.

The Enhancement of Recruitment, Retention and Readjustment Through Education Act, S. 2938, is aimed at two distinct groups of service members—those who have completed their enlistment, and those who have decided to make military service a career.

Our legislation is unique in allowing more service members to transfer education benefits to family members, either a spouse or

dependent children.

"Our first objective is to strengthen the all-volunteer force. Accordingly, it is essential to permit transferability of unused education benefits from service members to family ... Transferability supports military families, thereby enhancing retention," Defense Secretary Robert Gates said recently.

Secretary Gates also noted that competing plans might have unintended effects. "Any enhancement of the education benefit, whether used in service or after retirement, must serve to enhance recruiting and not undercut retention," he added.

S. 2938 also increases monthly education benefits for active duty personnel, allows more service members to access Department of Veterans Affairs programs, increases benefits for members of the National Guard and Reserve, allows use of benefits to repay student loans, and creates a matching program to help more veterans graduate debt-free.

While this legislation provides a significantly higher monthly payment, it also gives service members wider choices of educational benefits and the freedom to choose those that best meet their needs.

Our first commander-in-chief, George Washington, expressed our national obligation this way: "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their country."

This new legislation is well timed. We can never do enough for those who, by their willingness to serve, help protect us and our way of life. But we can express our gratitude and strengthen our military by serving the needs of those who have defended our freedom.

*Sen. Cornyn serves on the Armed Services, Judiciary and Budget Committees. In addition, he is Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Ethics. He serves as the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee's Immigration, Border Security and Refugees subcommittee and the Armed Services Committee's Airland subcommittee. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge. For Sen. Cornyn's previous Texas Times columns: [www.cornyn.senate.gov/column](http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/column).*