



Vietnam Veterans In Canada

General Meeting (2007-17)

Agenda 530

16 August 2007

British Columbia Regiment (DCO), Vancouver, B.C.

Moment of Silence

United States Military Casualty Reports Received since 31 July 2007

Spc. Camy Florexil, 20, of Philadelphia, PA. died July 24 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle during combat operations July 23 in Baghdad. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kan.

1st Lt. Benjamin J. Hall, 24, of Virginia, died July 31 in Asadabad, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when insurgents attacked his unit during combat operations in Chowkay Valley, Afghanistan. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, Vicenza, Italy.

Sgt. Stephen R. Maddies, 41, of Elizabethton, Tenn., died July 31 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds suffered from enemy small arms fire. He was assigned to the 473rd Counter Rocket, Artillery and Mortar Platoon, Tennessee Army National Guard, Columbia, Tenn.

Cpl. Jason M. Kessler, 29, of Mount Vernon, Wash., died July 30 in northern Iraq of wounds suffered from a rocket-propelled grenade. He was assigned to C Company, 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Lewis, Wash.

Spc. Zachariah J. Gonzalez, 23, of Indiana. Gonzalez died July 31 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team), Fort Lewis, Wash.

Pfc. Charles T. Heinlein Jr., 23, of Hemlock, Mich. Heinlein died July 31 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team), Fort Lewis, Wash.

Pfc. Alfred H. Jairala, 29, of Hialeah, Fla. Jairala died July 31 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team), Fort Lewis, Wash.

Sgt. Taurean T. Harris, 22, of Liberty, Miss., died Aug. 2 in Kala Gush, Afghanistan, of wounds sustained from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 202nd Military Intelligence Battalion, 513th Military Intelligence Brigade, Fort Gordon, Ga.

Staff Sgt. Fernando Santos, 29, of San Antonio, Texas. Santos died Aug. 2 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash.

Spc. Cristian Rojas-Gallego, 24, of Loganville, Ga. Rojas-Gallego died Aug. 2 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash.

Spc. Eric D. Salinas, 25, of Houston, Texas. Salinas died Aug. 2 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds sustained when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Wash.

Master Sgt. Julian Ingles Rios, 52, of Anasco, Puerto Rico, died Aug. 2 in Baghdad when his HMMWV was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade. He was assigned to the 130th Engineer Battalion, of the Puerto Rico National Guard, at Aguadilla, Puerto Rico.

Spc. Braden J. Long, 19, of Sherman, Texas, died Aug. 4 in Baghdad, of injuries sustained when his hmmwv came under grenade attack. He was assigned to the 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kan.

Tech. Sgt. Joey D. Link, 29, of Portland, Tenn., died of natural causes at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, Aug. 5. He was assigned to the 39th Airlift Squadron, Dyess Air Force Base, Texas.

Lance Cpl. Cristian Vasquez, 20, of Coalinga, Calif., died Aug. 2 from wounds suffered while conducting combat operations in Al Anbar province, Iraq. He was assigned to 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Sgt. Dustin S. Wakeman, 25, of Fort Worth, Texas. Wakeman died in Hawr Rajab, Iraq, when the vehicle he was in struck an improvised explosive device during combat operations. He was assigned to the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, Fort Richardson, Alaska.

Cpl. Jason K. Lafleur, 28, of Ignacio, Colo. Lafleur died in Hawr Rajab, Iraq, when the vehicle he was in struck an improvised explosive device during combat operations. He was assigned to the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, Fort Richardson, Alaska.

Pfc. Jaron D. Holliday, 21, of Tulsa, Okla. Holliday died in Hawr Rajab, Iraq, when the vehicle he was in struck an improvised explosive device during combat operations. He was assigned to the 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, Fort Richardson, Alaska.

Pfc. Matthew M. Murchison, 21, of Independence, Mo., died August 4 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds suffered when the vehicle he was in struck an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 127th Military Police Company, 720th Military Police Battalion, 89th Military Police Brigade, Hanau, Germany.

Spc. Charles E. Leonard Jr., 29, of Monroe, La., died August 5 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds suffered when the vehicle he was in was struck by a rocket propelled grenade. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas.

Sgt. Bradley W. Marshall, 37, of Little Rock, Ark. Marshall died July 31 in Tunis, Iraq, of wounds suffered from enemy indirect fire. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, Fort Richardson, Alaska.

Spc. Daniel F. Reyes, 24, of San Diego, Ca. Reyes died July 31 in Tunis, Iraq, of wounds suffered from enemy indirect fire. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, Fort Richardson, Alaska.

Sgt. 1st Class Travis S. Bachman, 30, of Garden City, Kan., died Aug. 1 in Mosul, Iraq, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle during combat operations in Al Basrah, Iraq. He was assigned to the 714th Security Force, Kansas Army National Guard, Topeka, Kan.

Spc. Christopher T. Neiberger, 22, of Gainesville, Fla., died Aug. 6 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Schweinfurt, Germany.

Sgt. Jon E. Bonnell Jr., 22, of Fort Dodge, Iowa, died Aug. 7 from wounds suffered while conducting combat operations in Al Anbar province, Iraq. He was assigned to 1st Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Spc. Justin R. Blackwell, 27, of Paris, Tenn. Blackwell died Aug. 5 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds suffered from enemy indirect fire. He was assigned to the 59th Military Police Company, 759th Military Police Battalion, 89th Military Police Brigade, and Fort Carson, Colo.

Pvt. Jeremy S. Bohannon, 18, of Bon Aqua, Tenn. Bohannon died Aug. 5 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds suffered from enemy indirect fire. He was assigned to the 59th Military Police Company, 759th Military Police Battalion, 89th Military Police Brigade, and Fort Carson, Colo.

Staff Sgt. Jacob M. Thompson, 26, of North Mankato, Minn. Thompson died Aug. 6 in Baqubah, Iraq, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team), Fort Lewis, Wash.

Sgt. Nicholas A. Gummersall, 23, of Chubbuck, Idaho. Gummersall died Aug. 6 in Baqubah, Iraq, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team), Fort Lewis, Wash.

Cpl. Juan M. Alcantara, 22, of New York. Alcantara died Aug. 6 in Baqubah, Iraq, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team), Fort Lewis, Wash.

Spc. Kareem R. Khan, 20, of Manahawkin, N.J. Khan died Aug. 6 in Baqubah, Iraq, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (Stryker Brigade Combat Team), Fort Lewis, Wash.

Spc. Donald M. Young, 19, of Helena, Mont., died Aug. 8 in Baghdad, Iraq, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle during combat operations Aug. 7 in Baghdad. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas.

Cpl. Reynold Armand, 21, of Rochester, N.Y., died Aug. 7 in Balad, Iraq. He was assigned to 2nd Assault Amphibian Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, II Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Lejeune, N.C. The death is currently under investigation.

Staff Sgt. Joan J. Duran, 24, of Roxbury, Mass., died August 10 in Iraq of injuries suffered from a non-combat related incident. She was assigned to the 5th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C. The incident is under investigation.

Pfc. Jordan E. Goode, 21, of Kalamazoo, Mich., died Aug. 11 in Zormont, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 4th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C.

Pvt. Alan J. Austin, 21, of Houston, TX., died Aug. 12 near Forward Operating Base Sharana, Afghanistan, of injuries suffered from a non-combat related accident. He was assigned to the 782nd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C. The incident is under investigation.

Pfc. William L. Edwards, 23, of Houston, TX., died Aug. 11 in Arab Jabour, Iraq, of wounds suffered when enemy forces attacked his unit with small arms fire. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Ga.

Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey D. Kettle, 31, of Madill, Okla. Kettle died Aug. 12 in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg, N.C.

Staff Sgt. Jesse G. Clowers Jr., 27, of Herndon, Va. Clowers died Aug. 12 in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg, N.C.

Sgt. Charles B. Kitowski III, 31, of Farmers Branch, Texas. Kitowski died Aug. 12 in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the 345th Psychological Operations Company, 2nd Psychological Operations Group, U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), Fort Bragg, N.C.

Sgt. Michael E. Tayaotao, 27, of Sunnyvale, Calif., died Aug. 9 from wounds suffered while conducting combat operations in Al Anbar province, Iraq. He was assigned to 7th Engineer Support Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Staff Sgt. William D. Scates, 31, of Oklahoma City. Scates died Aug. 11 in Arab Jabour, Iraq, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Ga.

Sgt. Scott L. Kirkpatrick, 26, of Reston, Va. Kirkpatrick died Aug. 11 in Arab Jabour, Iraq, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Ga.

Sgt. Andrew W. Lancaster, 23, of Stockton, Ill. Lancaster died Aug. 11 in Arab Jabour, Iraq, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Ga.

Spc. Justin O. Penrod, 24, of Mahomet, Ill. Penrod died Aug. 11 in Arab Jabour, Iraq, of wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Ga.

Casualty Count is now 4164

Since 10 November 2001

VVIC Meeting Business

Guests Present

Announcements and Acknowledgements

President's Remarks

(D. Sinclair, AUS)

1st Vice President's Remarks

(G. Flowers, USMC)

Sgt. Flowers is still TDY to Honduras and the littoral waters.

2nd Vice President's Remarks

(T. O'Malley)

Chief of Staff's Remarks

(S. O'Grady, AUS)

Master At Arms Remarks

(K. Payne, USN)

General Collection

Minutes of the previous meeting

Finance Officer's Report

Intelligence Officer's Report

Service Officer's Report

1. P. Knauth, AUS

Obtaining medical reports from the Bellingham Vet Center for his service officer located in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

Inspector General's Report

Quartermaster's Report

Legislative matters:

Administrative Items:

1. Sgt. Michael Hammell, USAF, Vietnam Veteran – Dues received for 2007 and for 2008. DD214 already on file, but second copy sent anyway.
2. Fraser Valley Marines
3. D. Crockett dues deposited and credited? State he gave check to Don Sinclair several weeks ago. Hasn't cleared yet.
4. Gerald Mapstone, Acting President, VVAFCT, Australia. Writes in an email: "This message is for Don who so kindly returned the information on the VVIC to me. My wife and I are visiting in August 21-24 and staying in Vancouver at the Howard Johnson hotel. We are keen to see some of the veterans and to swap information on matters such as Pension eligibility and what we are doing for our veterans in regard to gaining better conditions etc. I will phone when we arrive to catch up with you.
5. Advance dues payments and credit there of.

Old Business:

1. Merging the meeting agendas of the VVIC and the American Legion Post for the purposes of conducting the business of Veterans and organizational efficiency.

New Business:

1. Motion to maintain an up to Current Year Membership List and a Membership List of members paid up for the next year.
2. Motion to have a year to date detailed Financial Report.
3. Formal Signing of the Constitution and Bylaws of American Legion Post 75, Department of Washington as amended and finalized at the July 2007 meeting.

New Business from the floor:

The next General Meeting is 30 August 2007 at 1930 hours at the British Columbia Regiment.



Vietnam Veterans In Canada

Minutes 529

General Meeting held on 02 August 2007
British Columbia Regiment, Vancouver, B.C.

Aug 2, 2007

6 Present
2 Guest 1 bartender
Meeting Called to Order Don Sericlaire
Officer Remarks
Ken Payne brought copies of Paper Safe For Member Present
Woodrow diverted coin. Bidding to \$10.00
For General Fund.

Vet line is dead.
Woodrow reports on Vantage advantages.

Service Officers Reports
Phil need full reports
Don's claim being discussed
Dave's no actual contact.

Old business
letter to legislators supporting Dr Bokan
American Region - merge agenda
template.

New Business None

Ken Payne acting on behalf of Steve O'Grady,
Chief of Staff



Airmen Missing in Action from Vietnam War are identified

August 03, 2007

NEWS RELEASES from the United States Department of Defense

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of two U.S. servicemen, missing in action from the Vietnam War, have been identified and will be returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

They are **Lt. Col. James H. Ayres, of Pampa, Texas**, and **Lt. Col. Charles W. Stratton, of Dallas, Texas**, both U.S. Air Force. Ayres will be buried Aug. 10 in Pampa, and Stratton's burial date is being set by his family.

On Jan. 3, 1971, these men crewed an F-4E Phantom II aircraft departing Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base on a nighttime strike mission of enemy targets in Savannakhet Province, Laos. Shortly after Ayres initiated a target run, the crew of other aircraft in the flight observed a large explosion. No one witnessed an ejection or heard beeper signals, and communication was lost with the aircraft. Hostile activity in the area prevented search and rescue attempts.

In 2001, a joint U.S./Lao People's Democratic Republic (L.P.D.R.) team, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), traveled to Savannakhet Province and interviewed Laotian citizens about their knowledge of aircraft crash sites. One of the men led the team to what was believed to be the Ayres and Stratton crash site.

Later that year, another U.S./L.P.D.R. team began excavating the site. The team recovered human remains and aircrew-related items. Between 2002 and 2005, joint teams visited the site six more times to complete the excavation, recovering more human remains and crew-related items.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory also used mitochondrial DNA in the identification of the remains.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO Web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1169.

[Web Version: <http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=11196>]

Soldiers Mia From Vietnam War Are Accounted For

August 06, 2007

NEWS RELEASE from the United States Department of Defense

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that group remains of five U.S. servicemen, missing in action from the Vietnam War, will be returned to their families soon for burial with full military honors.

They are Chief Warrant Officer Dennis C. Hamilton, of Barnes City, Iowa; Chief Warrant Officer Sheldon D. Schultz, of Altoona, Pa.; Sgt. 1st Class Ernest F. Briggs Jr., of San Antonio, Texas; Sgt. 1st Class John T. Gallagher, of Hamden, Conn.; and Sgt. 1st Class James D. Williamson, of Olympia, Wash.; all U.S. Army. The group remains of this crew will be buried on Aug. 14 at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C. Gallagher's remains were individually identified, and his burial date is being set by his family.

Representatives from the Army met with the next-of-kin of these men to explain the recovery and identification process, and to coordinate interment with military honors on behalf of the Secretary of the Army.

On Jan. 5, 1968, these men crewed a UH-1D helicopter that was inserting a patrol into Savannakhet Province, Laos. As the aircraft approached the landing zone, it was struck by enemy ground fire, causing it to nose over and crash. There were no survivors. All attempts to reach the site over the next several days were repulsed by enemy fire.

Between 1995 and 2006, numerous U.S./Lao People's Democratic Republic /Socialist Republic of Vietnam teams, all led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), conducted more than five investigations, including interviews with Vietnamese citizens who said they witnessed the crash. Between 2002 and 2006, JPAC led three excavations of the site, recovering remains and other material evidence including identification tags for Schultz, Hamilton and Briggs.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC also used dental comparisons in the identification of the remains.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO Web site at [http:// www.dtic.mil/dpmo](http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo) or call (703) 699-1169.

Presidential Commission's Reports on Walter Reed Scandal

Friday , August 03, 2007

By Col. David Hunt

Fox News

The President's Commission On Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors — led by Sen. Bob Dole and former Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala — has just reported back on their findings on how this nation cares for its wounded heroes.

The short answer is, we don't.

The presidential commission was very politically correct and would not name names or blame anyone for the disaster that we witnessed a few months ago at Walter Reed. Only seven people were fired. We are also told that it was "just a coincidence" that the president went running with heroic amputees around the White House on the day the report was written ... hmmm.

Can we just stop all this bull? Can we just look straight into the camera and say, "We suck, we apologize and now we are now going to fix it?" And, perhaps give the wounded warriors, and you, their families, a free cell phone with unlimited minutes ... one that has *one* number to dial, that is manned by U.S. citizens — not Pakistanis — who will answer and help you with you medical issues? Can we give the press complete open access to the problem as they uncover it? Can we not just look in the camera and say, "In 30 days I will come back out here and keep coming every 30 days until every damn service member's medical problem is fixed?"

We had a deal with these soldiers — you fight for us and we will take care of your wounds. That means *all* of your wounds — physical and emotional — that you got while serving, for the rest of your life, quickly and efficiently. The soldiers kept their end of the deal they always do. We have been lying scum-buckets. We have used soldiers for backdrops to make political points — we have said how much we love soldiers ... basically a "thanks for your service." I gotta tell you, when you are missing a body part, or have such emotional and or mental problems that you lose your family, "thanks" just does not cut it.

We can go to the moon, we can go to Iraq, we can worry about Lindsay Lohan's life, we can cry with Paris Hilton ... but how about we fix this massive betrayal of our service men and women. Not tomorrow. *Today*.

Colonel David Hunt, U.S. Army (Ret.), is a FOX News military analyst and the author of the New York Times bestseller [They Just Don't Get It](#). He has extensive operational experience in counterterrorism, special operations, and intelligence operations. He has trained the FBI and Special Forces in counterterrorism tactics, served as the security adviser to six different Olympic Games, testified as an expert at many major terrorist trials, and lectured at the CIA, the FBI, and the National Security Agency.

Administration Fights Dem Plan to Boost School Aid for Vets

By Alexandra Bahou and Anna Schechter
ABC News

Thursday 09 August 2007

The Bush administration opposes a Democratic effort to restore full educational benefits for returning veterans, according to an official's comments last week.

Senate Democrats, led by Virginia's Jim Webb, want the government to pay every penny of veterans' educational costs, from tuition at a public university to books, housing and a monthly stipend.

Such a benefit was a major feature of the historic 1944 G.I. Bill, which put more than eight million U.S. soldiers through college and is now credited by historians as fueling the expansion of America's middle class in the post-war era.

But in recent years the benefit has dwindled; under the current law, passed in 1985, veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan can expect Uncle Sam to cover only 75 percent of their tuition costs. That's not enough, say Democrats and veterans' advocates.

More than 450,000 used the benefit last year, at a cost to taxpayers of \$2 billion, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which administers the program. The Democratic proposal would cost an additional \$5.4 billion a year, the VA estimates - and that's too much, it says.

Keith Wilson, the VA official who oversees the education benefits program, told senators last Friday the proposal would make "administration of this program cumbersome," and its costs would "tax existing VA resources."

But Democrats appeared unfazed. The current GI Bill is "woefully inadequate, given the service our military men and women have provided since [the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks]," said Webb, a combat veteran and former Navy secretary, who introduced the legislation that would expand the program. Webb's bill has 19 Democratic co-sponsors, including Sens. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., and John Kerry, D-Mass., a fellow veteran.

Patrick Campbell of the Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) endorsed Webb's plan. Better educational benefits are essential for attracting talented, ambitious recruits, he asserted.

"If the Department of Defense said, 'If you serve your country, we'll pay for school no questions asked,' ... [that] would increase the quality of our recruits," said Campbell, "instead of what we're doing now, which is lowering our standards."