



# IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS OF AMERICA

## **IAVA Successfully Shepherds New GI Bill to Victory**

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America played a critical role in shepherding the new post-9/11 GI Bill to victory. Working closely with the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Senators Jim Webb (D-VA), Chuck Hagel (R-NE), John Warner (R-VA) and Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), IAVA helped build a united front among veterans' organizations and a bipartisan consensus in Congress to make the new GI Bill a reality.

Over the course of 18 months, our GI Bill campaign involved every department of IAVA.

IAVA's widespread presence in the media made the GI Bill a prominent national issue. In the six months before the GI Bill was signed into law, IAVA representatives advocated for the new GI Bill in 200 separate media appearances. IAVA staff appeared on NBC's "The Today Show," the "CBS Evening News," the "NBC Nightly News," CNN's "Lou Dobbs Tonight," MSNBC's "Countdown with Keith Olbermann," and NPR's "Morning Edition"; as well as in *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Newsweek*. IAVA also ran two successful paid media print campaigns in key states across the country and in Washington, DC, reaching 3.4 million readers.

In addition, our communications and online departments worked locally to thank our Congressional cosponsors and solidify their support for a new GI Bill. Between March 11 and May 16, 2008, IAVA sent local press releases to thank 7 Senators and 41 Representatives for signing on to cosponsor the new GI Bill. We also sent 88 emails to our supporters in different Congressional districts and states, asking them to call and thank their Senators and Representatives for their support. To create a hub for online activism, IAVA developed our website [GIBill2008.org](http://GIBill2008.org). At its peak, the website educated 10,000 visitors per day on the need for a new GI Bill and what they could do to help.

IAVA was also at the forefront of GI Bill research. IAVA produced a compelling issue report, "A New GI Bill: Rewarding Our Troops, Rebuilding Our Military." Read by over 2,000 journalists, Congressional staffers, and members of the public, the report is a thorough and convincing explanation of the need for and value of a new GI Bill. IAVA also provided the first reliable analysis of the recruiting boost a new GI Bill would provide, and cast doubt on the Bush Administration's false arguments about the GI Bill as a threat to manpower.

But the most influential aspect of our GI Bill campaign was our lobbying effort on Capitol Hill. IAVA's legislative advocates participated in thousands of meetings with Congressional staffers and members, promoting the GI Bill and answering questions regarding the legislation's many complicated facets.

Among GI Bill policy experts, IAVA's Chief Legislative Counsel Patrick Campbell is widely agreed to be one of the foremost national experts on the new legislation. IAVA also brought dozens of IAVA member veterans from around the country to Washington to lobby their representatives on behalf of the new GI Bill. Our 2006 and 2007 "Storm the Hill" legislative advocacy weeks resulted in over 120 meetings between Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their representatives in Washington.

In total, IAVA's year-long effort cost approximately \$300,000, and resulted in the passage of a bill that will dedicate over \$60 billion dollars to the education of our newest generation of veterans. Like the World War II GI Bill, this new law will allow the men and women of our Armed Forces to dream bigger dreams, and to become the new Greatest Generation. The passage of this GI Bill is indeed an historic event, and a proud moment in the history of America's support for our troops and veterans.

The following timeline tracks the day-by-day effort of IAVA's staff and veteran volunteers, and reveals the critical importance of IAVA's work in the success of the GI Bill.

## Timeline

### Jan 2007

1.4 Almost 300,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are relying on education benefits that don't cover the cost of college. Senator Jim Webb of Virginia introduces the Post-9/11 GI Bill, intended to ensure Iraq and Afghanistan veterans receive the same robust education benefits provided to veterans of World War II and Korea. The bill, when it is introduced, has no cosponsors.

1.31 Tom Bush, Principal Director for Manpower and Personnel at the Department of Defense, testifies before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, outlining DOD opposition to the Post-9/11 GI Bill. His testimony reads in part, "The Department finds no need for the kind of sweeping (and expensive) changes offered."

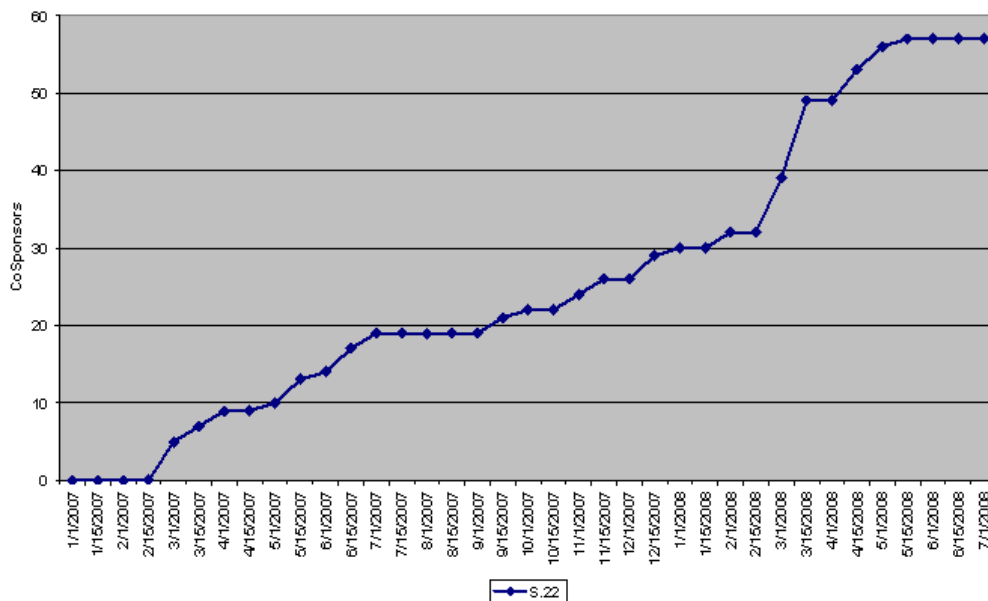
### Feb 2007

2.14 IAVA picks a "WWII-Style GI Bill" as a top priority in our 2007 Legislative Agenda. IAVA's annual "Storm the Hill" Congressional advocacy week brings eight IAVA representatives to Capitol Hill to meet with over 50 Senators and Representatives to promote the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

### Apr 2007

IAVA begins a regular meeting schedule with Congressional staff to push the GI Bill forward. This effort will continue for over a year, until the passage of the bill is complete, and plays a key role in increasing Senate co-sponsorship:

Senate Cosponsorship of the Post 9/11 GI Bill



**May 2007** IAVA officially meets with Senator Webb's staff, and joins the Partnership for Veterans Education to advocate on behalf of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Over time, IAVA's advocacy helps sway the Partnership away from other, less robust GI Bill legislation, and towards endorsing the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

5.9 Daniel L. Cooper, VA Undersecretary for Benefits, testifies before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on VA opposition to the Post-9/11 GI Bill on the grounds of cost.

5.30 IAVA endorses the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

**Jun 2007**

6.14 Webb holds GI Bill press conference introducing the House version of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. IAVA member veteran Bill Ferguson speaks at the press conference. The Senate bill now has 17 cosponsors, including Sen. Frank Lautenberg, a World War II veteran who used the original GI Bill.

**Jul 2007**

7.7 IAVA's Chief Legislative Counsel Patrick Campbell testifies before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and strongly endorses the Post-9/11 GI Bill.



**Aug 2007** IAVA meets with the Campaign for A New GI Bill, providing guidance on the substance of the legislation, and effective lobbying targeting and techniques.

**Sep 2007** IAVA holds joint meetings on the GI Bill with VFW's National Legislative Committee.

9.17 *CQ Weekly*, a widely-read Capitol Hill publication, publishes a profile piece on IAVA's GI Bill advocacy efforts. The article begins, "Patrick Campbell and Bill Ferguson are Iraq War veterans who have visited so many congressional offices together this year lobbying for a new GI Bill that they sometimes finish each other's sentences." The article also notes how far the GI Bill has yet to go, concluding, "The Administration is actively opposing a new GI Bill, and Congress has been, at most, ambivalent."

**Oct 2007**

10.24 Senator Chuck Hagel, an influential Republican and Vietnam veteran, signs on as a cosponsor to the new GI Bill.

**Nov 2007** IAVA builds a crucial coalition of leading veterans groups, and develops joint plan of action with the VFW.

11.11 "We sent them to war. Can't we send them to college, too?" IAVA Action, IAVA's sister (c)4 organization, places Veterans Day newspaper ads in key states. The ads reach a total readership of 1.4 million people, and are designed to thank GI Bill supporters in Congress and to draw attention to those who have not yet signed on.

IAVA Action also runs a version of the ad in *The Washington Post*, listing all current cosponsors, and thanking them for their commitment to veterans. IAVA alerts our entire email base to the publication of the ads, and asks them to email their representatives regarding the GI Bill. Within a week, the Senate bill gains two new cosponsors, raising cosponsorship level to 26 Senators.

11.11 *The New York Times* publishes an op-ed by Senators Webb and Hagel in favor of the new GI Bill.

**Dec 2007** IAVA convinces leading veterans groups that a WWII-style GI bill must be included in the "2008 Independent Budget," the VA budget recommendation endorsed by over 60 veterans, military, and health care groups.

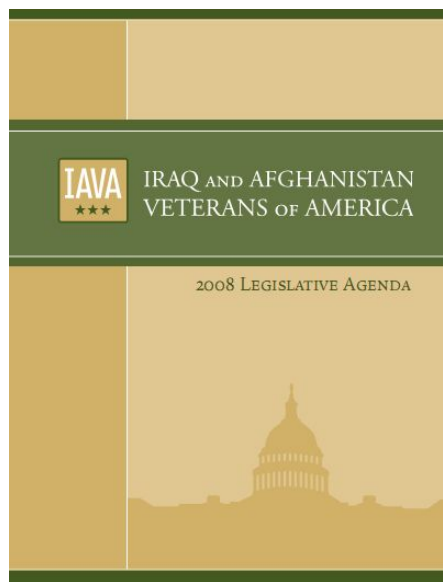
IAVA coordinates the development of a consensus between the VFW, the American Legion, and the Military Officers Association of America on the key priorities for GI Bill legislation. The groups conclude that any GI Bill proposal must pay the full cost of a public education, and must reward reservists for multiple active-duty tours, in order to be considered for endorsement. Draft proposals to revise the post-9/11 GI Bill include consensus priorities.

**Jan 2008** Between January and July 2008, IAVA is featured in 200 different media pieces on the GI Bill, and IAVA Executive Director Paul Rieckhoff writes 13 GI Bill articles for the Huffington Post and Military.com. During this time period, IAVA also sent out 15

national press releases referencing the organization's efforts for a new GI Bill, each reaching more than 2,000 media contacts.

IVA's Chief Legislative Counsel Patrick Campbell edits the first revision of the post-9/11 GI Bill and assists the Congressional Budget Office in determining the bill's cost.

- 1.16 IVA arranges a meeting between Senator Webb's staff and the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, to learn how the GI Bill could fit into the budget and appropriations process.
- 1.17 IVA's Patrick Campbell testifies before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, endorsing the post-9/11 GI Bill and explaining the need for a fair benefit for the National Guard and Reserves.
- 1.28 IVA issues State of the Union press release and grassroots email: "A New GI Bill Is the Strategy for Solid Economic Growth That Nobody Is Talking About."
- 1.30 IVA releases new issue report, "A New GI Bill: Rewarding Our Troops, Rebuilding Our Military." Over the next six months, over 2,000 copies of this report are distributed to Congressional offices, media, and the public.



Feb 2008

- 2.7 IVA launches 2008 Legislative Agenda on Capitol Hill. Our top Legislative Priority reads: "Build a New GI Bill. IVA supports a modernized WWII-style GI bill that fully covers the cost of an education at any public school or equivalently-priced private school. Benefits

for Reserve/National Guard servicemembers should be based on the cumulative length of their deployments and not on their single longest deployment.”

- 2.10 IAVA brings over 20 IAVA representatives for the annual “Storm the Hill” week. IAVA representatives met with over 70 offices, advocating solely for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The advocacy week is profiled in *The Hill*, a widely-read daily paper on Capitol Hill. In the next month, 30 cosponsors sign on to the GI Bill, an increase of 24 percent. Eleven of those new cosponsors signed on during or directly following an IAVA “Storm the Hill” meeting.



- 2.10 *The Boston Globe* quotes IAVA Executive Director Paul Rieckhoff, Director of Government Affairs Todd Bowers, and member veteran Will Bardenwerper in an article on the GI Bill.
- 2.13 Senators Webb, Hagel and Lautenberg call for a new GI Bill to be included in the 2009 budget. IAVA is featured in the introductory press conference, and Paul Rieckhoff is quoted in the resulting article in *The Hill*.
- 2.13 IAVA’s Todd Bowers testifies before House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity to urge passage of the GI Bill.
- 2.15 IAVA’s Paul Rieckhoff testifies before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee to urge passage of the GI Bill.
- 2.21 Through IAVA.org, 9,300 letters have been sent to Congress in support of the new GI Bill.

- 2.28 Senators Webb, Hagel, Lautenberg and Senator John Warner introduce an improved version of the Post-9/11 GI Bill that includes all the major revisions developed and recommended by IAVA. An email to our base asks them to call their Senator if he or she has not yet cosponsored the GI Bill.

**Mar 2008** IAVA begins a two-month campaign of localized press releases and emails thanking Senators and Representatives who sign on to the GI Bill. Almost 50 press releases and 88 grassroots emails are sent.

- 3.7 IAVA's Director of Government Affairs, Todd Bowers, is profiled on NBC's "The Today Show." An email with the video goes to our supporters.

- 3.14 MSNBC's "Countdown with Keith Olbermann" interviews Paul Rieckhoff regarding the GI Bill.

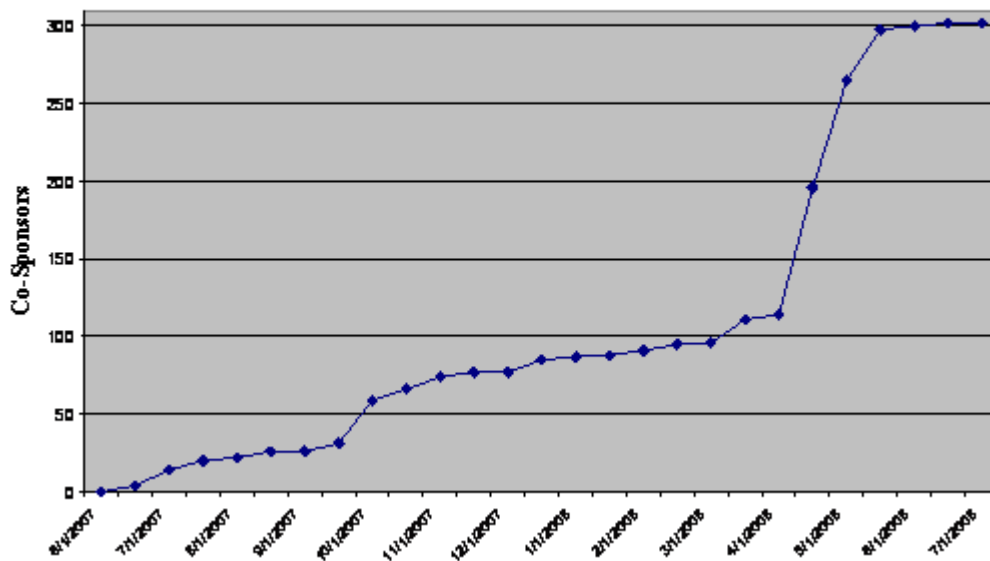
- 3.31 *Newsweek's* Anna Quindlen writes an editorial advocating for the new GI Bill and quoting Paul Rieckhoff. An email is sent to our base, sharing the *Newsweek* article.



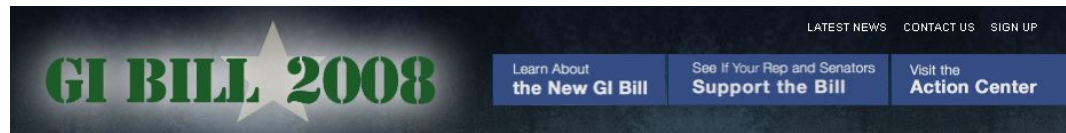
**Apr 2008** IAVA pressures Senate VA Committee Chairman Akaka to sponsor the new GI Bill, and encourages House VA Committee Chairman Filner to increase his public support for the bill.

IAVA and VFW participate in daily joint meetings with House staffers, up to about 10 meetings per day, resulting in a dramatic upswing in post-9/11 GI Bill cosponsorship:

**House Cosponsorship of the Post 9/11 GI Bill**



- 4.3 The Senate version of the GI Bill hits 50 cosponsors, or half the Senate.
- 4.9 Representative Harry Mitchell releases revised House version with 170 cosponsors.
- 4.10 NPR's "Morning Edition / Market Place" interviews IAVA's Todd Bowers on the need for a new GI Bill.
- 4.10 Senator Akaka becomes an official cosponsor of the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
- 4.14 IAVA launches [www.GIBill2008.org](http://www.GIBill2008.org). An article published the following week in the *Politico* increases traffic by 50%.



- 4.14 IAVA Action runs newspaper ads targeting top appropriators, encouraging them to find funding for the post-9/11 GI Bill. The ads run in six papers across the country, reaching a readership of 2 million people.
- 4.15 IAVA's Patrick Campbell again testifies before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, illustrating shortcomings of other GI Bill proposals.
- 4.18 IAVA publishes rebuttal to the Department of Defense's false arguments that a new GI Bill will harm the military's overall troop strength.
- 4.20 The *Waco (TX) Tribune-Herald* publishes "Time for a New GI Bill," an op-ed written by IAVA founding member Perry Jefferies. The op-ed specifically thanks Texas Representative Chet Edwards, a leader on veterans' issues and in the appropriations process.  
  
IAVA convinces two opposing partisan entities (Moveon.org and Veterans for Freedom) to delay attack ads regarding the GI Bill, giving the GI Bill an opportunity to move forward without partisan rancor, even in an election year.
- 4.22 The House version of the GI Bill has the support of 218 cosponsors, or half the House of Representatives.
- 4.28 IAVA Executive Director Paul Rieckhoff and Director of Government Affairs Todd Bowers speak at a rally and press conference on the Capitol steps with the four lead House and Senate cosponsors of the revised Post-9/11 GI Bill, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and other leading supporters of the GI Bill. Over the following week, web traffic at [GIBill2008.org](http://GIBill2008.org) doubles.



Caption

- 4.29 "CBS Evening News" and CNN's "Lou Dobbs Tonight" run interviews with IAVA's Todd Bowers talking about the need for a new GI Bill.
- 4.30 The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* publishes an op-ed by IAVA founding member Ray Kimball, entitled, "Fighting for an education: The nation owes our veterans a new and improved GI Bill." Pennsylvania was chosen as a target state to encourage Representative Murtha, a combat veteran and a leader on the Appropriations Committee, to support funding for the new GI Bill.

## May 2008

- 5.1 Chairman Filner issues a statement of strong support for the Post-9/11 GI Bill over other GI Bill proposals, saying: "A number of different bills have been proposed to address the needs of our veterans. I believe that S. 22, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2007, is the best blue-print for a new system."
- 5.4 The *San Francisco Chronicle* publishes "Empty Promises – The Lure of the GI Bill," by IAVA's Patrick Campbell.
- 5.5 The House version of the GI Bill has the support of 288 cosponsors, or two-thirds of the House of Representatives.

- 5.6 In his *New York Times* column, Bob Herbert supports a new GI Bill, saying, “At the top of the list of no-brainers in Washington should be Senator Webb’s proposed expansion of [veterans’] education benefits.” The article quotes IAVA’s Paul Rieckhoff.
- 5.6 In the House, the GI Bill is included in the draft version of the emergency supplemental war funding bill.
- 5.6 A coalition of “Blue Dog Democrats” opposes the new GI Bill on the grounds of fiscal conservatism, despite their support for the \$150-plus billions of off-budget war funding. IAVA works to lobby the Blue Dogs, and to aid in the vote count before the vote. IAVA sends national press release criticizing the Blue Dogs’ position. IAVA Executive Director Paul Rieckhoff personally contacts the Blue Dog leader, Rep. Herseth Sandlin, to address her objections to GI Bill funding. IAVA sends grassroots emails to districts held by Blue Dog leadership, asking our supporters to call their Representative and demand they support the GI Bill.
- 5.6 IAVA representatives Vanessa Williamson, Patrick Campbell, Todd Bowers meet with Chris Paul, from Senator John McCain’s committee staff, multiple representatives of Senators Graham and Burr, and Vets for Freedom Executive Director Pete Hegseth to discuss the GI Bill. Senator Graham himself attends the meeting briefly. The staff of all three offices are not open to signing on to the Post-9/11 GI Bill, even if the legislation were changed to include transferability of benefits.
- 5.7 Over the week, multiple emails alert IAVA supporters of impending GI Bill vote, and urging them to call their Representative.
- 5.9 IAVA’s Patrick Campbell is interviewed on CNN’s “Lou Dobbs Tonight.”
- 5.14 In a last minute move in the Senate, Senator Graham attempts to attach his weaker version of the GI Bill to an unrelated piece of legislation. Passage of this measure would block any future for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The Graham/Burr GI Bill amendment is defeated by a vote of 55-42.
- 5.15 By a vote of 256-166, the House votes to pass the Post-9/11 GI Bill. In the Senate, the Post-9/11 GI Bill passes out of the Appropriations Committee. Traffic at GIBill2008.org reaches 2,000 hits a day.
- 5.15 MSNBC’s “Countdown with Keith Olbermann” interviews Paul Rieckhoff regarding the GI Bill.
- 5.15 IAVA’s Patrick Campbell participates in a GI Bill press conference with House Speaker Pelosi.
- 5.16 “NBC Nightly News” profiles IAVA’s Todd Bowers regarding his experiences returning to school after combat, and the need for a new GI Bill.

- 5.19 In the lead-up to the vote, it is unclear whether the domestic spending provision of the emergency supplemental, which includes the GI Bill, will survive a close floor vote. Targeted emails are sent to 6 states, urging Senators on the fence to vote in favor of the GI Bill.
- 5.22 The Senate votes to pass GI Bill, 75-22.
- 5.27 The *Wall Street Journal* publishes a long profile of IAVA's efforts on behalf of the new GI Bill.

**Jun 2008**

- IAVA advises the Campaign for a New GI Bill on newspaper ads against Blue Dog Democrats.
- 6.06 IAVA supporters receive email encouraging them to watch a clip from "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" about the new GI Bill and sign our petition in favor of the legislation. GIBill2008.org traffic hits 2,700/day.
- 6.06 IAVA meets directly with the leadership of Blue Dog Democrat Caucus.
- 6.12 Petition to the President, urging him not to veto GI Bill, is sent to supporters. Visits to GIBill2008.org hit 4,600.
- 6.13 IAVA Executive Director Paul Rieckhoff appears on PBS's "The Tavis Smiley Show" regarding the GI Bill.
- 6.18 The White House announces a deal struck on the GI Bill. IAVA lauds this bipartisan agreement in a press release, and sends email to our base. GIBill2008.org visits reach nearly 5,000.
- 6.19 The House votes to pass the new GI Bill, 416-12.
- 6.24 IAVA participates in the victory GI bill press conference with Senators Webb, Warner, Hagel, Lautenberg and Reid.



6.24 The Senate votes to pass the new GI Bill, 92-6.

6.30 The White House signs the GI Bill into law.

## Jul 2008

Visits to GIBill2008.org peak at 10,000/day. Since its mid-April launch, over 123,000 visitors have come to the GIBill2008.org site. In the two weeks after the bill was signed into law, IAVA staff members have received about 1,200 emails and phone calls from veterans asking about their new benefit.

IAVA and VFW co-host a "Thank You" reception for lawmakers and staffers who helped move the GI Bill forward. Senators Webb, Hagel, Warner, Akaka, Murray, and Levin, and Representatives Scott, Mitchell and Hall attend. Senators Hagel and Webb record thank you messages for IAVA supporters.

IAVA begins the process of converting GIBill2008.org from a campaign site into the most thorough resource available for veterans seeking to understand their new GI Bill benefit. The new site will include an exhaustive list of frequently asked questions, a GI Bill Benefit Calculator, and links to the VA for application information.