

Scott County Iowa Veteran Affairs
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Welcome Home

Biden urges vets to apply for burn pit benefits right away

By Leo Shane III

President Joe Biden held a veterans town hall event in Delaware on Friday to cap a week of public events highlighting new benefits and services for former service members with toxic exposure injuries, particularly those caused by burn pits. "I'm urging all veterans of these decades of war to enroll in VA health care to get screened for toxic exposure and to promptly file your claims," he told a crowd of veterans and dignitaries gathered at the Maj. Joseph R. "Beau" Biden III National Guard/Reserve Center. "The VA will move as quickly as possible to resolve your claim and to get you the benefits you've earned." The Department of Veterans Affairs hosted more than 100 events over the last seven days to raise public awareness of the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, better known as the PACT Act. They included public-service announcements from celebrities and in-person events in every U.S. state. But Biden's involvement in the effort lent even more emphasis to the message, and included a pledge from the commander in chief that his administration will continue to look for ways to help and thank veterans. "We have a lot of obligations as Americans, but we all have one sacred obligation: to take care of those we send to war and care for them and their families when they come home," he said. "I mean, and I know my colleagues mean, that from the bottom of our hearts."

The PACT Act — passed last summer following a high-profile push for the legislation from Biden in his March State of the Union address — provides presumptive benefit status for 12 types of cancer and 12 other respiratory illnesses linked to burn pit exposure in the Gulf War, the War in Afghanistan and the War in Iraq.

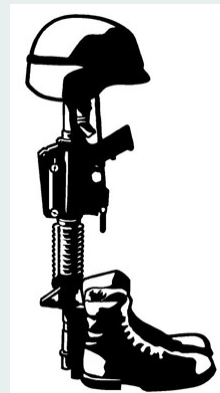
The presumptive benefits status allows veterans to receive disability payouts even if they can't prove a direct link to a chemical exposure during their time in service. Because of the widespread use of the trash fires in both Iraq and Afghanistan, anyone who served in the region is considered to have been breathing in the toxins.

The measure also provides presumptive benefits status for hypertension and monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS) for veterans who served in Vietnam, and radiation-related illnesses for veterans who served in several new locations in the 1960s and early 1970s. As many as one in five living veterans in America today could see new services or payouts because of the law.

But VA Secretary Denis McDonough told town hall attendees on Friday that those new benefits are only useful if veterans take advantage of them. Since the summer, more than 176,000 veterans have applied for disability benefits under the law. VA will begin processing most of those cases on Jan. 1. "We will not rest until every single veteran and survivor knows about this new law, understands what it means for them, and gets the care and benefits they've earned," he said. "That's what our country owes you. And that's what we will deliver to you."

[Biden urges vets to apply for burn pit benefits right away \(militarytimes.com\)](https://www.militarytimes.com)

- Are you newly discharged from the military? Were you injured or do you have health issues that may be related to your service? Make an appointment to see if you qualify for disability compensation.
- Are you a service member, veteran, or the surviving spouse of a service member? Make an appointment to see what types of benefits may be available to you.



SCOTT COUNTY VETERAN AFFAIRS

The Veteran Services program provides assistance to all veterans and their dependents in applying for federal and/or state benefits and other related matters. Federal benefits include:

Applying for:

- Compensation (Service connected disability)
- Pension (Non-service connected disability)
- Widow's Benefits
- Survivors Benefits Plan
- Certificates of Eligibility for Home Loans
- Aid and Attendance for Nursing Home and Housebound Veterans
- Iowa's Veteran's Home Admittance
- Apportionments
- Overpayments
- Appeals
- Obtaining military records and medals
- Upgrading discharge
- Distributing grave markers and flag holders

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Know the difference between Montgomery, post-9/11 GI Bills before 2023

By Harm Venhuizen

When pursuing an education after the military, veterans are often faced with the choice between using the Montgomery GI Bill or the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Which of these benefits is right for you depends on your educational goals and service history.

Both the Montgomery and the Post-9/11 GI Bills offer up to 36 months of tuition assistance, but eligibility and payment structures differ. Although veterans can only use one GI Bill at a time, those eligible for both programs can extend their benefits to a maximum of 48 months, receiving another benefit for 12 months.

POST-9/11 GI BILL

Under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the VA will pay up to the in-state tuition price tag of public universities. For veterans enrolled in a private institution, tuition assistance is capped at a current national maximum of \$26,042.81.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill also offers benefits including a monthly housing allowance, annual book stipend of up to \$1,000, and a one-time relocation payment for eligible recipients.

The monthly housing allowance is typically the same as the basic allowance for housing that an E-5 with dependents would receive in the same zip code.

For veterans who separated prior to Jan. 1, 2013, Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits expire 15 years after separation, but the "Forever GI Bill" passed in 2017 removed this limitation for service members separating after Jan. 1, 2013.

Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits can also be transferred to the service member's dependents.

Veterans receiving Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits can also apply to school with a Yellow Ribbon program, which helps cover the gap between benefits and out-of-state tuition, graduate school tuition, or costs at private institutions. Only certain schools have Yellow Ribbon agreements with the VA, so be sure to check with your desired institution first.

THE MONTGOMERY GI BILL

The Montgomery GI Bill breaks down into two types, the MGIB Active Duty and the MGIB Selected Reserve. MGIB-SR benefits, which are open to members of reserve and National Guard forces, pay a flat-rate check of \$397 to full-time students each month.

The MGIB-AD, however, offers up to a \$2,122 monthly rate. These rates change each year.

Instead of paying tuition benefits to the school, as the Post-9/11 GI Bill does, the MGIB sends a monthly check directly to the student. Students are not eligible for housing allowances or book stipends and cannot receive additional funds through the Yellow Ribbon Program. MGIB benefits cannot be transferred to dependents.

While on active duty, the MGIB offers a buy-up program for service members to contribute to. Service members who paid into this fund to increase their benefits can only use their contributions under the MGIB.

SO, WHICH GI BILL IS BETTER?

In most scenarios, the Post-9/11 GI Bill offers veteran students more financial assistance than the MGIB, especially when pursuing a standard, four-year degree at an accredited higher learning institution or passing your benefits to a dependent. There are a few exceptions, however. Namely: **Taking tests:** When pursuing a license or paying for a standardized test, the Post-9/11 GI Bill may charge you a greater amount of benefits entitlement than the MGIB. This depends on the cost of the test and varies by scenario.

Part-time students: If you're only taking classes part time, it may be more beneficial to use MGIB benefits. This is because the Post-9/11 GI Bill doesn't pay monthly housing allowances to students with a rate of pursuit under 50 percent. Tuition assistance is then paid relative to the rate of pursuit. Under the MGIB, lower percentages of benefits could wind up giving you more cash than receiving the Post-9/11 GI Bill without a housing allowance would.

Ineligible for 100% of the Post-9/11 GI Bill: Veterans who didn't serve on active duty for more than 36 months aren't eligible for 100% of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The Post-9/11 GI Bill pro-rates your allowances based on the amount of time you did serve on active duty, whereas the MGIB allows veterans to make a lump-sum contribution to close the gap between their time served and 100-percent eligibility requirements.

Online classes: If taking online classes with a low cost per credit, veterans can pocket more cash by taking advantage of their MGIB benefits instead of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. This is because the Post-9/11 GI Bill limits the housing allowance paid to students who are entirely online.

For veterans thinking about using their GI Bill benefits to pursue an education, the smartest thing to do is research options well in advance.

Every veteran has unique educational goals and circumstances, so there's no one-size-fits-all approach to using your GI Bill.

[Know the difference between Montgomery, post-9/11 GI Bills before 2023 \(militarytimes.com\)](https://www.militarytimes.com)