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On Memorial Day, Retired USAF Lt. Col. Charlie Brown Urges Bush to Support New GI Bill

Says Measure Needed to Keep Faith with Veterans, Restore America's Military, and Strengthen U.S. Economy

ROSEVILLE: Fourth District Congressional Candidate and Retired USAF Lt. Col. Charlie Brown today praised House and Senate passage of the Post 9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act (New GI Bill), and called upon President Bush to "honor veterans this Memorial Day," by supporting the measure and signing it into law.

"This isn't just about keeping a promise to those who have served," said Brown. "It's a solution to the recruitment problems plaguing our military, and a vital investment in America's economic future."

A 1988 Congressional Study found that for every dollar invested in the original GI Bill—which made a free college education (including tuition, books, and a living stipend) available to more than 15 million World War II veterans—returned \$7 to the U.S. economy. It's credited with helping to drive America's post WW II economic boom, producing more than 230,000 teachers, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 doctors, and 450,000 engineers.

"A GI Bill with fully funded educational benefits has a track record of producing innovators, expanding prosperity, and strengthening America's middle class," Brown said. "That's what we need to help get our economy back on track."

While polls show that money for college is the top reason new recruits join the military, the current "Montgomery" GI Bill has proven inadequate. Unlike the original, it covers only a fraction of college costs, requires veterans to pay an up front fee, has been undermined by bureaucratic problems and claim backlogs, and offers limited benefits to activated National Guard and Reserve—who comprise as much as 40% of our active combat force in Iraq.

Under the new GI Bill, all veterans (regular components, Guard and Reserve) activated for 3 months or more would qualify for benefits. Those who have served on active duty for 3 years or more since 9/11 would qualify for a full benefit—equivalent to the costs of a four year education at the most expensive in-state public school.

"A new generation of heroic Americans have stepped forward to defend our country, and like their predecessors, have been promised an opportunity for a brighter future when they come home," Brown said. "The new GI Bill is not really a new concept—it affords Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans the same opportunities we gave WW II veterans," Brown said.

The military is currently spending more than \$4 billion annually on recruitment. Recruitment problems across the uniformed services have led the military to lower age, education and aptitude standards for enlistees. Enlistment costs have dramatically increased in recent years, and are expected to skyrocket as the Defense Department undergoes a planned expansion of the Army and Marine Corps. The Congressional Budget Office estimates the new GI Bill will increase military recruitment by 16%.

"Our military is already stretched dangerously thin, and America's long term security demands the ability to recruit and retain the most highly skilled troops," Brown added. "As the top incentive for new enlistees, this new GI Bill will more than pay for itself in the long term and enhance our ability to defeat global terrorism."

The new GI Bill is endorsed by every major national veterans group, and enjoys broad bi-partisan support. District 4 Congressman John Doolittle voted against it.

"This is not a partisan issue," concluded Brown. "It's our patriotic duty and it's good public policy."

Retired Lt. Col. Charlie Brown spent 26 years in the U.S. Air Force, flying rescue helicopters at the end of the Vietnam War, piloting reconnaissance missions around the world, and coordinating a variety of intelligence collection assets. His decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross, Sikorsky Winged S, 7 Air Medals, and 5 Meritorious Service Medals. Charlie's wife Jan is also a veteran, and his son has served four rotations in Iraq with the Air Force. A graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, Brown also owns a California teaching credential and served 8 years on the Professional Staff of the Roseville Police Department. He is a candidate for Congress in California's 4th District.

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