



# VETERANS EDUCATION SUCCESS

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**Contact:** Carrie Wofford, (202) 422-6338

## **U.S. Congress Unanimously Votes to Restore GI Bill Benefits to Vets that Attended Defunct ITT Tech and Corinthian Colleges**

*The "Forever GI Bill" will also expand and protect Veterans' education benefits*

**Washington, D.C.** – Demonstrating a bipartisan commitment to our country's student military veterans, the U.S. Senate today passed - by "hotline" (a form of unanimous consent without an actual floor vote) - the "Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017," commonly known as the "Forever GI Bill." A one-page summary of the legislation can be found [here](#).

Through unanimous consent, Senators have vowed to protect the integrity of the GI Bill for current and future American veterans and significantly expand access to education for veterans who become eligible for benefits after 2018. This follows the unanimous passage on the House Floor on July 24 and unanimous Veterans Affairs Committee votes in the House on July 19 and in the Senate on July 26. The text of the bill was previously worked out as a bipartisan, bicameral bill.

After intense, behind-the-scenes negotiations, the legislation will also restore full GI Bill benefits for students defrauded by the for-profit ITT Tech and Corinthian colleges that were abruptly shut down for misleading students and saddling them with crippling student loan debt. The package also includes important quality assurances that were also the result of behind-the-scenes negotiations over narrower provisions of the bill, including independent study and coding boot camps.

"We are grateful that Congress heard the pleas of our defrauded student veterans and cared enough to pass this legislation in such an overwhelming fashion," said Carrie Wofford, president of Veterans Education Success, an advocacy organization for student veterans. "We worked very hard behind the scenes to increase the coverage from one semester to full restoration of GI Bill for our ITT Tech and Corinthian veterans, and this will send a message to other colleges going forward not to defraud student veterans and leave them hanging with worthless credits. Our veterans deserve better."

After months of sanctions and years of investigations and lawsuits for consumer fraud of its students, ITT Technical Institute closed down in September 2016 after the U.S. Education Department increased its letter of credit requirement following ITT's failure to answer its accreditor's "show cause order" as to why it should maintain accreditation after years of being out of compliance with accrediting standards and charging students exorbitant tuition in exchange for worthless degrees, non-transferable credits, and a staggering amount of student loan debt. ITT was also under significant law enforcement action for running an illegal private loan scheme (the subject of an [ongoing lawsuit](#) by the US Consumer Financial Protection Bureau) and for consumer fraud of students, which brought numerous State Attorneys General lawsuits, including, for example, lying to its nursing students about their eligibility to work as registered nurses (the subject of a [lawsuit](#) by the New Mexico Attorney General).

Veterans Education Success had also brought to the Education Department's attention, prior to its action against ITT Tech, a very high level corporate whistleblower from ITT Tech who alleged fraud specifically targeting veterans, as well as 400 ITT Tech student veterans who claimed they were victims of consumer fraud by ITT Tech.

Likewise, in April 2015, the Corinthian College chain, another for-profit college, shuttered its campuses after the Department of Education levied the company with a \$30 million fine for publicizing falsified job placement data and altering grades and attendance records.

"This legislation rightfully restores GI Bill eligibility for these vets who've been defrauded out of their hard-earned GI Bill," said Wofford. Specifically, the bill limits full restoration to those veterans who were enrolled when the schools closed and who did not transfer those closed school credits to a new school. Full restoration is limited to schools that closed between January 1, 2015, and date of enactment of the bill. Looking forward, veterans at schools that close or lose VA approval for GI Bill will be entitled to reinstatement only of the semester that was interrupted, under the terms of the legislation.

**Kevin Delaney**, 31, a U.S. Army veteran from Girard, KS, had just signed up for a new semester at ITT when the school abruptly closed without warning. "We had no idea why the school was closing and nobody told us," he said. "We were in the dark about our credits, classes, benefits, everything. I used a large chunk of my GI Bill so I couldn't afford to start from scratch."

Delaney, who'd served in the military for more than nine years, said he thought he'd received some financial relief in the form of a tuition refund check he received from ITT Tech for \$2,800. However, when he deposited the check into his account, it bounced (reported in news media as a common occurrence for ITT students following the closure). There's never been any recourse.

**Caleb Bennett**, 25, of Indiana had a similarly harrowing tale, one that also ended up with a bounced refund check from ITT. The U.S. Army veteran was blindsided when ITT announced it was shuttering all of its campuses. "I wasted two years of my GI Bill benefits and also lost an on-campus job that was helping me get by," he said. "At the time, my son was a year-and-a-half old and my wife was expecting our second child. It was a nightmare. After serving in the military

for five years, including a deployment to Afghanistan, I end up evicted from my home. My car was repossessed and my GI Bill all but gone. I earned those benefits serving my country.”

The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, named for the principal architect of the original GI Bill, will also remove time restrictions to use the GI Bill, enabling future eligible recipients to use their GI bill benefits for their entire lives, as opposed to the current 15-year timeline. It also provides 100 percent GI Bill eligibility to Post-9/11 Purple Heart recipients who otherwise had not yet met the eligibility requirements, and ensures GI Bill eligibility for members of the Armed Forces serving under specific Reserve and Medical Hold orders that had inadvertently been left out of GI Bill coverage. Furthermore, the package extends Yellow Ribbon coverage to children of the Fallen and enables the transfer of GI Bill benefits to children of the Fallen.

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