



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

District 8 – Capitol Building, Room 319 Jefferson City, MO 65101

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Contact: Todd Scott
(573) 751-1464 / (888) 711-9278

Affordable Tuition for Combat Vets

As our men and women return from the battlefields of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations in the war on terror, sometimes we give them parades and welcome home parties. Many people feel compelled to give these brave folks a slap on the back and a heartfelt “Thank You” for all they have done. These are all fine ways for us civilians to show how much we appreciate the sacrifices they have made. But we can do more.

To that end, this week the State Senate passed Senate Bill 75, which I co-sponsored, that would put limits on what colleges and universities receiving state funding could charge to combat veterans. Under this bill, any Missouri resident who served in the U.S. military after September 11, 2001 would not pay more than \$50 for each credit hour taken. Participants would have to maintain a 2.5 grade point average on a 4.0 scale.

In addition, we included everyone who served after the terrorist attacks that launched this global war on terror, not just those sent to Afghanistan and Iraq, to recognize that it takes many people playing different roles to make our Armed Forces function. The reality of war is that even those who may not be deployed to the war zone do make very real sacrifices. Many of our men and women in uniform leave behind families for months at a time, missing birthdays, holidays and hundreds of other important events. Not only that, but every member of the military helps form part of an instrumental support structure, backing up those who patrol the streets of Iraq or the mountains of Afghanistan.

More than 60 years ago, members of the “Greatest Generation” returned from the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific to fuel the growth of our nation – turning America into an economic and military superpower. These veterans were given the opportunity to better themselves and this country through the benefits of the GI Bill. That landmark piece of legislation gave a free education to every veteran who helped win the war and preserve democracy throughout the world. While SB 75 is more modest, I believe it is a step in the right direction... a direction that will reap benefits for this country long after the war on terror is won by our fighting men and women.

If you have comments or questions about this week’s column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/07info/members/mem08.htm>.