

**Welcoming Comments to the  
34th Annual NAVPA Conference**  
*October 21, 2009*

Good morning everyone and welcome to St. Louis, the Gateway to the West and to this 34th Annual Conference of the National Association of Veterans Program Administrators. I also extend a very special thank you to the NAVPA board of directors and to all of you who have traveled from near and far to be here.

The presentation of colors we just witnessed is always a stirring moment and humbly reminds us of our mission and why we have gathered here – all of us are committed to serving our country's veterans and this conference provides many opportunities for us to learn more about serving our veteran students.

The GI bill has been heralded as one of the most significant pieces of legislation ever produced by the federal government—one that impacted the United States socially, economically and politically. But it almost never came to pass.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944—commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights—nearly stalled in Congress as members of the House and Senate debated provisions of the controversial bill.

Some shunned the idea of paying unemployed veterans \$20 a week because they thought it diminished their incentive to look for work.

Others questioned the concept of sending battle-hardened veterans to colleges and universities, a privilege then reserved for the rich.

Before the war, college for the most part, was an unreachable dream for the average American.

Thanks to the GI Bill, millions of veterans who would have flooded the job market instead opted for education. In the peak year of 1947, veterans accounted for 49 percent of college admissions. By the time the original GI Bill ended 1956, 7.8 million of our 16 million World War II veterans had participated in an education or training program. Sound like the Post 9/11 GI Bill came just in time.

So today, we gather at this conference for comprehensive education and training opportunities for new certifying officials, and outstanding presentations geared to your professional development on hallmark topics such as Troops to Teachers, Servicemember Opportunity College, Best practices and of course information on Chapter 33 and the Yellow Ribbon Program.

These new education benefits programs are the most far-reaching overhaul of Veterans Education Benefits since the original GI Bill created after WWII. We all know the GI Bill helped educate a generation of CEOs and phenomenal leaders in both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. Fourteen won Nobel Prizes and three GI Bill beneficiaries served as U.S. Presidents: Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford are two of them, who was the third? (George Herbert Walker Bush (41)). Other GI Bill benefit recipients include, Senator Bob Dole, former Surgeon General, Joycelyn Elders, and newsmen—from an era when news really was news—David Brinkley and John Chancellor. We can also add Clint Eastwood, Paul Newman and Coach Tom Landry to this list.

The GI Bill-assisted the career of William Rehnquist, former chief justice of the Supreme Court. When his military service was finished, he

used the GI Bill to enroll at Stanford University, where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in political science and eventually a law degree. When asked years later how he had chosen his profession, Rehnquist answered, perhaps with tongue in cheek, "The GI Bill paid for an occupation test that told you what you ought to be. They told me to be a lawyer."

But you know who else is the beneficiary of the GI bill with help from people like you who so professionally steer veterans through the process? Mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, neighbors, teachers, small business owners, nurses.... I could go on and on.

Today the legacy of the original GI bill lives on in the Post 9/11 GI Bill and in the commitment that each of you makes every day to help our veterans succeed. The theme of this conference, "Gateway

to the West for Education” promises to be the best NAVPA conference ever.

Prepare yourself to be challenged, excited and inspired. Thank you all for being here, welcome, and enjoy the conference.