

American Legion salute to the GI Bill begins June 20 at WWII Museum

The American Legion

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American Legion 100th Anniversary Honorary Committee Chairman Ted Roosevelt IV will moderate a panel discussion June 20 at the National WWII Museum in New Orleans that will explore the legacy, current status and evolving future of the GI Bill.

Visitors planning to attend are asked to call the museum in advance at 1-877-813-3329, extension 412.

The free event begins with a 5 p.m. reception, with snacks and beverages, and a viewing of “The Greatest Legislation: An American Legion Salute to the GI Bill” exhibit in the museum. Showcased are the cover and signature pages of the original Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, on loan from the National Archives, the original typewritten and hand-edited speech President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave after signing the bill on June 22, 1944, and a fountain pen he used, from The American Legion National Headquarters, among other artifacts.

“This is the first time the GI Bill has been shown outside of the National Archives,” Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero said. “We are honored to share this and FDR’s speech – two original historic treasures – with the American people for this important exhibit.”

The exhibit also features illustrated panels and touch-screen video kiosks that tell the story of the bill’s creation, the dramatic battle to get it passed, economic impacts on America and significance to millions of veterans who used it for their educations, careers and home ownership. The videos traverse generations, some famous, who used the GI Bill to help them in their post-military lives. The display and panel discussion both delve into the current state of the GI Bill and changes under way to improve it.

The panel discussion, which starts at 6 p.m., features former U.S. Sen. James Webb of Virginia, a highly decorated Vietnam War combat veteran and critically acclaimed author, who drafted and introduced the Post 9/11 GI Bill on his first day in office in 2007. It was passed the following year and enacted in 2009.

VA Deputy Under Secretary for Economic Opportunity Curtis Coy, Student Veterans of America President and CEO Jared Lyon and American Legion Assistant Director of Veterans Employment & Education John Kamin are also among the panelists. Following their remarks, the floor will be open for questions from the audience.

The panel discussion will be streamed live on the National WWII Museum website at www.nationalww2museum.org.

The original documents from the National Archives will be on display at the museum through Sept. 20, 2017, and the full exhibit will be in place there until Dec. 18, 2017. Following that, the display will be moved to a different venue and is scheduled to travel during The American Legion's centennial period, through November 2019.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, drafted and pushed to passage by The American Legion in 1943 and 1944 transformed the United States, building the middle class and democratizing higher education. It brought all veterans services under one federal roof – the Veterans Administration that in 1989 became the Department of Veterans Affairs – and improved hospital services and disability claims processing for those who came home from war.

The American Legion has worked continuously through the decades to keep the GI Bill viable for veterans. Just last month, the Legion and Student Veterans of America joined forces to put on a roundtable discussion at The American Legion National Headquarters in Washington, D.C., to discuss improvements that can be made to today's GI Bill, including protections for veterans whose for-profit colleges close down while they are using their benefits and fair treatment for reservists involuntarily called to active duty.

American Legion National Commander Charles E. Schmidt said he hopes that such activities as the moderated forum, the roundtable discussion and "The Greatest Legislation" exhibit at the National WWII Museum will elevate awareness of The American Legion's role in society over the last century, and into the future.

"It is my sincere hope that, as The American Legion centennial story is told over the next two years, that new generations will understand what this organization has done, is doing and will continue to do in a second century of service," he said in an email to members this week.