Mini DBQ: The G.I. Bill

Question: Did the G.I Bill meet its supporters’ expectations or were its critics on target with their concerns?

Task: Using the documents provided, craft a written response to the above question that thoroughly explores the topic. Consider intended as well as possible unintended effects.

Background information:

The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, known informally as the G.I. Bill, was a law that provided a range of benefits for returning World War II veterans (commonly referred to as G.I.s). These benefits included low-cost mortgages, low-interest loans to start a business, cash payments of tuition and living expenses to attend college, high school or vocational education, as well as one year of unemployment compensation. It was available to every veteran who had been on active duty during the war years for at least ninety days and had not been dishonorably discharged; combat was not required. By the end of the program in 1956, roughly 2.2 million veterans had used the G.I. Bill.

Document 1

FDR State of the Union Address, Jan 11, 1944

In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all regardless of station, race, or creed. Among these are:

- The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the Nation;
- The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation; . . .
- The right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad;
- The right of every family to a decent home;
- The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;
- The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment;
- The right to a good education.

All of these rights spell security. And after this war is won we must be prepared to move forward, in the implementation of these rights, to new goals of human happiness and well-being.
Document 2
Letter to Senator Clark, Chairman, Veterans’ Sub-Committee to Senate Finance Committee, Feb. 16, 1944 from O. Ketchum -- Veterans of Foreign Wars, Millard Rice – Disabled American Veterans, Frank Haley – Military Order of the Purple Heart, William Floyd – Regular Veterans Association

Everything that glitters is not necessarily gold!

Pressure is being brought to bear on the Congress to force immediate enactment of the so-called G-I Bill of Rights for the returning service men and women of World War II, identified as S. 1617, with amendments, not before your Committee.

Your Committee and the Congress may be interested to know that there is a serious question in the minds of some veterans groups as to whether this so-called G-I Bill of Rights, in its entirety, is a sound and equitable solution to the problems and needs of WWII veterans. Certain features of the bill, notable the Title on Educational Aid, are so broad in scope an potential cost, that its’ enactment would, in our opinion, probably not only prevent any consideration of several other more equitable proposals to solve such problems, but might also subsequently jeopardize the entire structure of veteran benefits and provoke another Economy act.

Our nation’s first responsibility should be to those who have suffered physical and/or mental handicap by reason of military or naval service. Any legislation which grants entitlement to four years of college training at government expense to any able-bodied veteran who had 90 days service should be carefully examined in the light of our tremendous war debt and the ability of the nation adequately to care for its war disabled.

Document 3
Senate Report, June 22, 1944

This legislation (GI Bill) is “a fundamental bill of rights to facilitate the return of service men and women to civilian life . . . We do assert that it is a comprehensive statement of the measures presently necessary and the it represents the very least that should be done at this time in justice to the veterans and in enlightened self interest for the remainder of the country . . . this bill authorizes a program which will be costly to the nation . . . We regard it as the best money that can be spent for the future welfare of the Nation.

Document 4
FDR's Statement on Signing the GI Bill, June 22, 1944

This bill, which I have signed today, substantially carries out most of the recommendations made by me in a speech on July 28, 1943, and more specifically in messages to the Congress dated October 27, 1943, and November 23, 1943:

1. It gives service men and women the opportunity of resuming their education or
technical training after discharge, or of taking a refresher or retrain course, not only without tuition charge up to $500 per school year, but with the right to receive a monthly living allowance while pursuing their studies.

2. It makes provision for the guarantee by the Federal Government of not to exceed 50 percent of certain loans made to veterans for the purchase or construction of homes, farms, and business properties.

3. It provides for reasonable unemployment allowances payable each week up to a maximum period of one year, to those veterans who are unable to find a job.

4. It establishes improved machinery for effective job counseling for veterans and for finding jobs for returning soldiers and sailors.

5. It authorizes the construction of all necessary additional hospital facilities.

6. It strengthens the authority of the Veterans Administration to enable it to discharge its existing and added responsibilities with promptness and efficiency.

7. With the signing of this bill a well-rounded program of special veterans' benefits is nearly completed. It gives emphatic notice to the men and women in our armed forces that the American people do not intend to let them down.

Document 5
The GI Bill of Rights, Changing the Social, Economic Landscape of the US (excerpt from US Dept. of State Publication, Historians on America by Milton Greenberg)

http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2008/04/20080423213340beafas.8454951.html#axzz2ig9V3PF

The end of World War II was a time of great drama and release for the nation as a whole. Naturally, few people, including many closely connected to the GI Bill's development, were aware of the implications of this revolutionary new law. Commentary of the time – inside and outside of Congress – tended to stress the costs and benefits of the unemployment readjustment allowance contained in the bill and to underestimate the education and loan program provisions. The readjustment allowance authorized $20 a week of unemployment funds for 52 weeks – and soon became known to its beneficiaries as the "52-20 Club." Because of the Great Depression, few in the age group of typical GIs had ever held a job. Skeptics in and out of government said that the giveaway of $20 a week would lead to irresponsible idleness. Opposition arose in Congress from some southern members who resisted providing that much money on an equal basis to blacks and whites. In the mid-1940s, $20 was a lot of money. For 15 cents or even less, one could buy gasoline, cigarettes, beer, milk shakes, or go to a movie. Yet – and this is indicative of that generation's response to the war's end, and the stigma in those days that came with accepting public money – only slightly more than half the veterans even claimed the money; and most used it for so few weeks that less than 20 percent of the estimated cost was actually spent.
For educational benefits, the method was for the Veterans Administration (VA) to certify eligibility, pay the bills to the school for tuition, fees, and books, and to mail a
monthly living stipend to the veteran for up to 48 months of schooling, depending upon length of service. For home loans for GIs, the VA guaranteed a sizeable portion of the loan to the lending institution and mortgage rates were set at a low 4 percent interest. The formal aspects of these programs have lived on in subsequent, though less generous, versions of the GI Bill for Korean War and Vietnam War veterans – and still continue as an enlistment incentive for America’s current volunteer military under what is now known as the Montgomery GI Bill.

Document 6
Educational Attainment
Percentage of population aged 25 and older

1910 = 3%
1998 = 83%
1910 = 13%
1998 = 24%

High school graduate or higher
College graduate or higher

Statistical Abstract of the United States (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, annual)
http://www.pbs.org/fmc/timeline/egibill.htm
Document 9

Home-Ownership Rate, 1900-2009

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Document 10

U.S. Birth Rate: 1940-1980
(Baby Boomer Generation in Red)

Maraline Ellis        Salem-Keizer School District  2013-2014