

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

President Signs Kline Bill to Provide Student Loan Relief to Troops

WASHINGTON, D.C. President George W. Bush yesterday signed into law the Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act of 2003 (HEROES). The bill, authored by Rep. John Kline (R-MN), will ensure support for military personnel by allowing the U.S. Secretary of Education to provide the appropriate assistance and flexibility to our men and women in uniform as they transfer in and out of postsecondary education during times of war and military deployment.

Today is an important day for our men and women in uniform. As President Bush signed the HEROES bill into law, he took the final step toward bringing relief to the members of our National Guard and Reserves who are also students, said Kline. By bringing a little more peace of mind to student soldiers, we are doing our part to protect them as they protect us. ’

The Education & the Workforce Committee acted quickly earlier this year to address the needs of military personnel as troops were deployed to regions overseas. On March 25, Rep. Kline and members of the Education & the Workforce Committee introduced the HEROES legislation, and on April 1, the House approved the bill in an overwhelmingly bipartisan show of support for the nation’s armed forces.

I’m pleased that the hard work of our committee members, and the leadership of Rep. Kline, has resulted in this important protection for the men and women defending America overseas, said Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), chairman of the Education & the Workforce Committee. By signing HEROES into law, the President has fulfilled our collective vision that our troops deserve our full support, particularly as they strive to achieve their educational goals while protecting our freedom. This legislation will continue to ensure that those serving our nation can do so without unnecessary higher education related financial burdens. ”

"The cost of a college education creates a troubling financial burden for many students, but students who are also members of the armed services face a particular struggle when they are called to active duty to defend our nation overseas," said Rep. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-CA), chairman of the 21st Century Competitiveness Subcommittee. "By signing HEROES into law, the President has helped ensure that these American heroes do not face additional financial hardship as they work toward the dream of a college education while serving and protecting our homeland and our freedom."

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Members of the House united in 2001 and unanimously passed similar legislation providing the Secretary of Education waiver authority in the midst of the tragedy of September 11th. The legislation signed into law by the President continues this support for military personnel, allowing the Secretary to address the needs of those serving now, and provide flexibility and relief for those who may need it in the future.

Many of the men and women serving in conflicts overseas are U.S. military reservists who are college and university students participating in federal financial aid programs. The HEROES legislation extends waiver authority that allows the U.S. Secretary of Education to excuse such military personnel from their federal student loan obligations while they are on active duty. For example, the families of military reservists who left their jobs when called to active duty could be relieved from making student loan payments during the time of service, and the families of borrowers serving on active duty could be given relief from collection calls from lenders while the conflict is taking place.

HEROES also allows the Secretary of Education to quickly react to unforeseen situations in order to provide the flexibility and protections necessary to best assist military personnel with the transition to and from postsecondary education as they work to serve our nation. Additionally, the bill asks postsecondary institutions to provide a full refund of tuition and fees to students for the period they were not able to complete because of their service, and minimizes requirements for reapplication, making it easier for military personnel to reenter their postsecondary education when they return from active duty.

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