



POST 9/11 TROOPS TO TEACHERS ENHANCEMENT ACT

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Senator John McCain (R-AZ) and Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO)

The bipartisan Post 9/11 Troops to Teachers Enhancement Act would:

- Make the Troops to Teachers program more accessible by reducing length of service requirements
- Expand the number of school districts in which participants can qualify for a stipend towards the costs of becoming a teacher;
- Create an advisory board charged with improving awareness of the program, increasing participation, and ensuring that the program meets the needs of our schools and our veterans.

Background:

Troops to Teachers (TTT) was established in 1994 to help troops transitioning to civilian life become teachers. TTT is funded by the Department of Education at about \$15 million a year and run by a Defense Department agency called the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support. It was last reauthorized by Congress as part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLBA, PL 107-110).

TTT helps eligible separated service members obtain teaching credentials and teach in all fields, particularly in priority subject areas, such as math and science. Under the current requirements for the program, eligible participants must be retired from active or reserve service and:

- For those separating from active duty service, they must have six years of continuous service and agree to serve at least three more years in the reserves;
- For those in the reserves, they must have at least 10 years of active or reserve duty, and commit to serve at least three more years.

Participants receive a stipend of up to \$5,000 to help defray the costs of obtaining their teaching certification. To receive the stipend, the participant must agree to teach in a "high need" school district, which is defined as a district with "a poverty rate of at least 20% or at least 10,000 poor children."

Participants are eligible for a bonus of \$10,000 in assistance in lieu of the stipend, if they teach in a high need school within a high end school district, defined as a school where "at least 50% of the students are from low-income families or the school has a large percentage of students who qualify for assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act."

A March 2006 Government Accountability Report (GAO) on the program found that TTT has contributed to the gender and racial diversity of the teaching workforce, as well as help increase the number of teachers in priority subject areas such as math, science, special education or vocational education. The GAO report found that:

- Over 80 percent of TTT participants are male and over 25 percent are African American, compared to 26 and 9 percent of the national new teacher population, respectively;
- 14 percent of TTT participants teach in elementary schools, 19 percent in middle schools and 37 percent in high schools;

- 60 percent of participants reported that they would not have become a teacher without the TTT program'
- About one-third of participants teach in priority subject areas such as math, science, special education and vocational education.

However, GAO also identified key challenges that limit the overall effectiveness of the program and areas for improvement:

- Geographical diversity of participants is limited, with a majority of participants hired to teach in just seven states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Texas and Virginia;
- Funding for the program has declined, from a high of \$29 million in FY03 to about \$15 million annually;
- The "high-need" school criteria established in 2005 has reduced interest and participation in the program, as schools in their regions and communities in which they had hoped to settle were no longer considered eligible for them to receive the stipend or bonus;

What this bill does:

Reduces service requirements so make the program more attractive to younger veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The bill allows any servicemember who has served at least 90 days of continuous active duty since September 11, 2001 eligible for participation in TTT. For those who have not served 90 days since 9/11, the bill reduces the active duty service requirement from six years to four. This change would increase the appeal of the TTT program to younger members of the military who may be returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with fewer than six years in the service.

Allow more participants to qualify for financial assistance for teacher certification and training. The bill extends the eligibility for the \$5,000 stipend to any participant who agrees to teach three years in any school that is in a district that receives Title I funds, as defined in Section 2102 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This section would qualify participants teaching in a wider range of school districts for the existing stipend towards teacher certification and training costs, which is currently limited only to those who teach in "high need" districts. According to the GAO, participation in the program has been focused on just seven states. One of the current disincentives to participation is a lack of eligible schools in the area in which a servicemember lives, or intends to live. By making more schools eligible, it will help increase the incentive for troops to consider participating in the TTT program and become teachers.

Creates an advisory board to provide direction and improve awareness of the program. The bill establishes Troops to Teachers Advisory Board to be composed of the DOD director of the program, a representative from the Department of Education, 3 representatives from state TTT offices, 3 representatives from veterans service organizations. This board would develop best practices for improvement recruitment of eligible service members into the program, increase awareness within eligible school systems, and coordinate the goals of the program with other federal, state, and local education needs and programs. The board will also address the need to improve awareness of the program, both to eligible members of the military and to communities with a need for highly skilled teachers in key subject areas. The bill also requires the board to prepare an annual report to Congress on key elements of the program, including the number of participants in the program, what subjects they are teaching, and where. The board would also submit recommendations to Congress on improving recruitment efforts at the federal, state and local levels, as well as any changes to the law needed to improve the program.

Authorizes Critical Resources for the Program. The bill authorizes \$50 million annually for the program for the next 5 years. While currently authorized at \$30 million a year, annual funding typically falls far short of this amount. The increased authorization recognizes the potential for growth in participation in the program.