

## **Go Back to School With the Post-9/11 GI Bill: A Lawyer's Story**

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With the last U.S. forces being pulled out of Iraq in December 2011 and troops expected to leave Afghanistan by 2014, over 1 million members of the armed forces will come off active duty and transition back to civilian life over the next five years. Some will have jobs waiting for them and others will join the crowded ranks of the unemployed.

While the unemployment rate for these post-9/11 veterans is improving, dropping from 12.5 percent in February 2011 to 7.6 percent in February 2012, their options extend beyond going to work or standing on the unemployment line (or recovering from battlefield injuries). Depending on their length of service, many who served in the military after Sept. 10, 2001 can have the U.S. Department of Defense pay for some or all of their tuition and fees and other expenses at institutions of higher education, including law school.

This unprecedented level of education assistance has been available since Aug. 1, 2009, when the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill went into effect. Through fiscal year 2011, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which administers the program, has paid for an estimated \$8 billion in education expenses for service members, veterans and their dependents. During the next fiscal year, 606,000 veterans, service members, survivors and family members are expected to have the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill pay for education expenses.

Some of these veterans will be aspiring attorneys attending law school, and others will be established lawyers looking to round out their education or to equip themselves with knowledge so they can better run their firms. I fell into the second category, and after two years of juggling work, family and school responsibilities, I received my M.B.A. in May 2011.

I was among the first wave of veterans who took advantage of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and enrolled in classes. Here is my story of using the Post 9-11 G.I. Bill, along with my insights into this government program's advantages, setbacks and quirks. Consider the following a survival guide for the Post-9/11 veteran who wants to be a lawyer or is already one and wants to go back to school.

### **Getting In**

Going back to school was the last thing on my mind in 2008. In April of that year, my law firm, Tully Rinckey, opened its first office outside Albany in Washington, D.C. So it's understandable that I did not pay much attention to the news when President George W. Bush signed the Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008 on June 30, 2008. The significance of this law sank in a few months later when I received a letter from the VA notifying me of my eligibility for Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits. The law substantially sweetened the education benefits that the federal government had provided under the Montgomery G.I.

Bill.

The Army had already paid for my undergraduate education in the 1990s while I served in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). After graduating from Hofstra University in 1995 with a B.B.A. in business management, I went to Touro Law School, receiving my juris doctorate in 1998. A year later, I started my service with the Army's Judge Advocate General's Corps, in which I served as a trial attorney, defense counsel, appellate defense attorney and a special assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. After being honorably discharged in 2004, I partnered with a college friend and fellow veteran, Mathew B. Tully, to found Tully Rinckey in Albany.

Due to my ROTC service, I was ineligible for the Montgomery G.I. Bill's education benefits. However, the VA letter informed me that under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, because I served in the armed forces after Sept. 10, 2001, the federal government would not only pay for graduate school tuition and fees but also for books and housing expenses. It was an offer I could not refuse, and within two months of receiving the VA letter I was enrolled in the University at Albany School of Business' executive-level Weekend M.B.A. Program for the fall 2009

“Great Customer Service” – C.R.

semester."Great customer service, thoroughly explained all aspects of my case. Thank you." - C.R.

“Cannot Thank You Enough” – R.S. and C.S.

"I cannot thank you enough for all that you did for us." - R.S. and C.S.

&#8220;Great Service&#8221; &#8211; E.S.

I want to thank you all for the great service rendered [to] myself and family. - E.S. on Client Relations Attorney Derrick Hogan

## Legal Disclaimer

The results of all client matters depend on a variety of factors unique to each matter. past successes do not predict or guarantee future successes.

“High Regard” – R.E.M.

“Your firm held my best interests with high regard... I thank you for your efforts.” - R.E.M.

“Prompt and Efficient” – K.B.

“Prompt and efficient in processing claim, all correspondence handled in prompt and efficient manner.” – K.B.

“Impressed” – W.W.

“As a retired heavy user of attorneys, I’m impressed with your concerns and your efforts to stay in touch with your clients. Its damned good management aligned with top notch expertise.” – W.W.

“Excellent Service” – J.R.

“Excellent service, very professional, and understanding and considerate of clients needs. Attorney was very approachable and there was a very good comfort level.” – J.R.

“Professional & Informative” – J.H.

“Professional & informative... I was pleased with the handling of the case. I was treated as a person, and kept abreast of all aspects of the case. Thank you all.” – J.H.

“Thanks So Much” – J.D.

“Without your Firm, I would not have known of my claim. Thanks so much!” – J.D.

“Gets Results” – F.P.

“Most certainly – The firm gets results!” – F.P.

“Quite Satisfied” – R.W.

“I am quite satisfied with the services your office has provided.” – R.W.

“Exceptional Legal Services” – A.S.

“Your firm, Tully Rinckey, has provided and continues to provide me with prompt, keen, exceptional legal services. After the initial consult, I felt relieved that I had the representation from Tully Rinckey... I have found a new found hope with Tully Rinckey...” – A.S.

“Absolute Best” – R.H.

“My attorney was the absolute best I could ever have hoped for. A pure professional in every

sense of the word. She was very mindful of my financial expenditure and still was able to represent me very well in my court case.”– R.H.

“Outstanding Service” – A.R.

“Outstanding service, true professional.” – A.R.

“Top Notch” – V.W.

“My attorney was top notch. Very pleasant and helpful.” – V.W.

“Ideal Choice” – D.H.

“My attorney knew exactly the approach to take and was the ideal choice. She was extremely responsive. She was clear, balanced, and open to our views and feelings. She made it clear she was there for us and ready to answer questions.” – D.H.

“Very Satisfied” – D.D.

“I was very satisfied with the services provided which were completed in a very timely and professional manner.” – D.D.

“Excellent” – B.M.

“Your Firm provides excellent & free service to federal workers and NG/USAR members.” – B.M.