



IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN
VETERANS OF AMERICA

ACTION FUND

Frequently Asked Questions

1) *I've heard of IAVA, but what is IAVA Action?*

Both are nonprofit and nonpartisan. IAVA Action is IAVA's 501(c)4 advocacy organization.

2) *How did you choose the votes?*

The votes in IAVA Action's 2008 Congressional Report Card reflect the priorities in IAVA's 2008 Legislative Agenda. They were selected as a result of our ongoing and consistent communication with our thousands of members across the country, both anecdotally and through formal polling.

3) *Why did you give lawmakers "extra credit" for co-sponsoring the GI Bill?*

Passing a new, World War II-style GI Bill was IAVA Action's highest legislative priority for the 110th Congress, because the old GI Bill simply did not make education affordable for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. The new GI Bill changes that by doubling the benefits, appropriating the biggest increase in veterans' educational benefits in 60 years. The GI Bill covers the cost of tuition and living expenses at the most expensive public school in each state, opening the doors of higher education for an entire generation of servicemembers.

We gave lawmakers two points for co-sponsoring the bill both because of its importance and because we wanted to recognize how crucial early support was for the ultimate passage of the bill. In terms of scoring, GI Bill cosponsorship was not "extra;" to earn a perfect score, a legislator must have joined every major veterans group in America (including the VFW, American Legion and others), and more than half of the Senate and more than three quarters of the House in cosponsoring the GI Bill.

4) *According to your scale, you can score 3/10 and still get a D. Why are the grades so generous?*

This year has been marked by tremendous successes, and that has been reflected in the grading. In our 2006 scorecard, we gave 13 Fs; this year, we gave only two. The bipartisan work and the advances for veterans deserve tremendous credit and recognition.

5) My Senator comes to my VFW hall every Christmas! How could he possibly get a D?

Our Report Card is based entirely on a Senator or Representative's actions in Congress this session. There are lots of ways to support the troops, like sending care packages or visiting your local veterans' hospital, and we think these things are very important. But Senators and Representatives are paid to go to Washington and represent the American people by sponsoring and voting on legislation. And that's what we grade them on. Action, not rhetoric.

6) McCain/Obama/Clinton/Biden missed votes because they were campaigning. Isn't that unfair? Why didn't you give them incompletes / give them credit based on votes they were there for?

IAVA believes our lawmakers have to put their money where their mouth is, and that means showing up and doing their jobs in DC. Our troops in Iraq are working every day. If I showed up to my job 30% of the time, I'd be fired. Moreover, Tim Johnson missed fewer votes than John McCain, and Senator Johnson was in a coma in early 2007. Senator Edward Kennedy had a brain tumor, and he still missed fewer IAVA Action votes than McCain and Obama. You can't support the troops if you're not there to vote for them.

7) Did Democrats do better than Republicans this year? How exactly do the two parties compare in the numbers?

Because so many major pieces of legislation passed this year, both parties did very well. In the House, 59% of our As and Bs went to Democrats, and 41% went to Republicans. In the Senate, 62% of our As and Bs went to Democrats, and 38% went to Republicans.

8) Why did more Democrats score well than Republicans? Doesn't that make you a partisan organization?

The methodology behind the Report Card is completely transparent-those who voted with veterans scored well, those who did not support our veterans did not. 51 Republicans got an A from us this year, including: Senators Kit Bond, Susan Collins, Chuck Hagel, John Warner, Olympia Snowe and Arlen Specter.

Part of the reason Democrats get more As is because there are more Democrats than Republicans in Congress. Secondly, some Republicans, especially in the Senate, scored poorly because they failed to support crucial veterans' legislation, particularly the GI Bill.

9) John McCain supported a different GI Bill. Why did IAVA oppose that legislation? (or) Why did John McCain oppose the GI Bill?

John McCain supported the Graham-Burr GI Bill. In terms of education benefits, Iraq veterans needed a tank, and the Graham-Burr GI bill was a bicycle. The Graham-Burr GI Bill was a very poorly-written piece of legislation, and it provided a meager benefit. The Graham-Burr GI Bill

received the support of NO major veterans service organization. It did not meet any of IAVA's requirements for a new GI Bill; it did not cover the cost of college, it did not create fairness for National Guardsmen and Reservists, and because it was not linked to the cost of college, it would lose value every year.

Both IAVA and the major cosponsors of the Post-9/11 GI Bill reached out on multiple occasions to Graham, Burr, and McCain's offices. At every turn, efforts to bring them on board with the Post-9/11 GI Bill were rebuffed.

10) What about transferability, the highlight of the Graham-Burr bill?

Even the old GI Bill gave the DoD the authority to offer transferability. Furthermore, it affects relatively few servicemembers. As Senators Webb and Warner made clear when they spoke about transferability on the Senate floor, the law already leaves transferability at the discretion of the service secretaries. In addition, the transferability provision was only for people who stay in the military for ten years. 75% of our military get out after their first enlistment – a rise in benefits for a portion of that last 25% is not a bad thing, but it is not the same as making college affordable to every Iraq veteran.

Passing this second-rate GI Bill would have blocked the path of the bipartisan and widely popular “Post-9/11 GI Bill,” which had the support of more than half the Senate, three quarters of Congress, and every major veterans service organization.

11) Why did Senator SoAndSo vote in a particular way on a particular bill?

That's a great question for the Senator or Representative. We just score them on the votes, we don't read minds. Anyone can use our website, VeteranReportCard.org, to contact their representatives' offices and ask them exactly these kinds of questions.

12) Why was S. 37895, the “Every Veteran Gets a Kitten Act,” not included? (Or other tangentially veterans-related legislation.)

We based our vote choices on the priorities of our Legislative Agenda. Every vote reflects one of our priorities. This year, our top action items were VA funding and the GI Bill, and that's what was emphasized in the Report Card.

13) The GI Bill passed as a part of war funding? I thought you didn't take a position on the war.

The GI Bill passed as a part of a domestic spending amendment, not the war funding itself. You could vote for the GI Bill and against war funding, or you could vote for the GI Bill and for war funding; they were separate votes.

14) Representative SoandSo voted against GI Bill funding because of the tax offset or the employment insurance provisions, not because they didn't support the GI Bill. (Or similar questions regarding the continuing resolution or NDAA.) Why are they penalized?

We know that lawmakers have to make compromises. That's why we're so thorough in our descriptions of the votes, so people can understand the politics behind the votes. In this case, the Representative picked another issue as more important, instead of voting for veterans. But we are aware of this issue, and it's part of the reason we included GI Bill cosponsorship as 2 points in our scorecard. We wanted to credit lawmakers who were early GI Bill supporters who might have felt obligated to vote against the GI Bill in one of the floor votes.

15) Iraqi refugees? Why does that matter to a veterans' organization?

Many of our veterans are still serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, or will deploy again in the next year or two. What happens on the ground in Iraq is of critical importance to our membership. That's also the reason we've included funding for MRAPs in our Report Card. For the same reason, it is critically important to our membership that America ensure the safety of our Iraqi allies serving as interpreters for our forces.

16) Is IAVA a partisan organization?

No. Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and the IAVA Action Fund are strictly nonpartisan organizations. Our national membership is comprised of Republicans, Democrats, Independents and everything in between. In preparing this Report Card, Democrat and Republican lawmakers were graded exactly the same way and were held to identical standards. Supporting veterans is a question of patriotism and rises above partisan politics.

17) What were the average grades in the House and Senate?

The average grades reflect the great progress the 110th Congress made on veterans issues. In both the House and Senate, the average grade fell on the dividing line between A and B.

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