



Rep. Anna G. Eshoo

Statement of Rep. Anna G. Eshoo
Third Amendment to the *Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008*
May 15, 2008

Madam Speaker, I'm very pleased that the Appropriations Committee included two important provisions in today's third amendment. First, it includes critical funding for Iraqi Christians and second, it modernizes and improves the GI bill.

I'm pleased that the amendment contains \$10 million for vulnerable Iraqi minorities, including Christians. The needs of Assyrians in Iraq could not be greater. A report produced by the Department of State on U.S. assistance to the Nineveh Plains in Iraq concluded that Christian minorities have experienced serious human rights abuses in the Nineveh Plains. The report also states that the region has absorbed a significant number of Christian internally displaced persons (IDPs) moving from the south, placing an economic burden in the area.

They are fleeing because they are being threatened and murdered in their home communities. Their priests are being executed, their churches burned, and their nuns threatened. In February of this year, Archbishop Paulos Rahho was abducted and murdered in Mosul.

While Assyrians only represented 5% of the total Iraqi population before the war, according to the United Nations today they comprise as much as 40% of the growing Iraqi refugees who have fled for their lives to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey.

These families desperately need security, housing, jobs, schools and the chance to live in a sustainable community where they can openly practice their faith. This funding is essential to their survival.

Also included in this amendment is a modernization of the GI Bill. The GI Bill has been heralded as one of the most successful government programs in the history of our nation. It gave a chance for millions of GIs the chance to go to college, many of whom were the first to receive a college education in their families. But the GI Bill is over 54 years old and has not kept up with rising tuition costs.

According to a recent Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) survey, 18% of the veterans recently back from tours of duty are unemployed. Of those employed since leaving the military, 25% earn less than \$21,840 a year. The survey also demonstrated that only 48.4% of the respondents took advantage of the GI Bill and concluded that receiving the benefits of the current GI Bill were not a strong predictor of successful employment outcomes.

This survey clearly demonstrates the need for this new GI Bill. The amendment provides veterans with a maximum educational benefit equal to the highest tuition rate of a public college or university in their state, as well as a monthly stipend for housing. It also establishes a new program in which private educational institutions would make financial contributions toward veteran's tuition, and the federal government would match those contributions.

When our veterans return from the battlefield, they should have every opportunity to enter the classroom and ultimately the civilian workforce. Our nation needs these brave men and women to contribute to the growth and health of our economy and this new GI Bill accomplishes this.

From development funding for Iraqi Christians to the creation of a new GI bill, this amendment addresses specific urgent needs for our nation and world. The amendment is well crafted and I urge my colleagues to support its passage.