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President's Weekly Perspective, 2008_07_14

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Monday Morning Message - July 14, 2008

Good morning.

Last Monday, President Bush signed into law the most sweeping change in the GI Bill since the program was begun in the days following World War II. Under the revisions, veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan will be eligible for nearly twice the tuition and housing funds they are presently getting. It's long overdue, and it will have a profound and favorable impact on life here at the University of New Mexico.

Although the new provisions won't go into effect until August of next year, veterans currently enrolled will get an interim 20 percent bump in benefits. Beginning in the fall semester of 2009, veterans will be able to get a four-year degree at no cost. For the first time ever, they can transfer benefits to their spouses and children. New benefits are also included for National Guard members and reservists.

The original GI Bill gave an entire generation of World War II veterans the chance to secure a college education, and in so doing, it helped shape the nation we live in today. It also transformed academia, changing the face of colleges and universities across the nation.

Here at UNM, I want to make it a priority for us to meet the challenge of serving the brave young men and women who will soon be trading combat fatigues for jeans and Lobos T-shirts. The adjustment from military to civilian student life isn't always an easy one, and we want to provide these veterans – and their families – with all the counseling and special assistance they need and desire. We're already working to ensure that they fully avail themselves of all the resources our grateful nation and generous community has to offer.

This past week, UNM and CNM started formalizing details of their "2+2" program with the signing of a transfer agreement that allows CNM students who earn an associate degree in liberal arts to transfer into UNM's College of Arts and Sciences. They will be able to apply credits and courses from CNM directly toward graduation requirements in A&S and can come in as juniors. This will be a tremendous potential pool for UNM as CNM has 3,600 declared associate of arts students. This also creates that student success pipeline we've been talking about – the one we believe will motivate students to complete their degrees. I join interim Provost Vi Florez in commending A&S Dean Brenda Claiborne and her team for believing in the value of this agreement and doing the work to get it done.

This coming week, my leadership team and I will spend a long day off campus beginning to chart our next year of work for the university. I think it's important to remember that we are always moving forward at UNM. So we don't hold retreats. This will be our second annual "Advance." I'm looking forward to some lively discussions.

Have a good week.

David J. Schmidly