The new GI Bill: Yellow ribbons, gold medals for deserving veterans

This fall, the "Post-9/11 GI Bill" went into effect, providing the most significant increase in benefits to our veterans in 65 years.

As we near the nation's observance of Veterans Day on Nov. 11, we all should pause to consider just what the original GI Bill was meant to do.

Known for the past 65 years as "the GI Bill," the Service-men's Readjustment Act of 1944 put the dreams of home ownership and a college education within the reach of the men and women who had served our country during World War II.

Thanks to the GI Bill, millions who would have flooded the job market instead opted for education, and then fueled the terrific expansion of our nation's economy.

My dad was one. He served in the South Pacific, reminding his three sons recently how he had spent days in a foxhole off the coast of Iwo Jima being shelled. Thanks to the GI Bill, he was able to go to college, unlike his father. Thanks to the GI Bill, he was able to buy the home in which we grew up.

Thanks to the GI Bill, he did not follow his father into the garment trades in New York City, but rose to the highest levels of a great insurance company in Philadelphia.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill similarly thanks those who put themselves in harm's way in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In general, those vets who attend California colleges will be eligible for up to $287 in tuition per credit hour and $2,165 in fees per term, along with living expenses of $1,716 per month.

But there is more. Under the "Yellow Ribbon Program," colleges and universities are able to make their own contributions to the veterans, further reducing the cost of tuition.

I am proud to say that Drexel University is one of the universities that offer entirely free tuition for any of the nine graduate programs we teach in Sacramento or any one of the 80 undergraduate or graduate programs Drexel faculty teach on-line.

Signing the GI Bill in 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said it honored those who "have been compelled to make greater economic sacrifice and every other kind of sacrifice than the rest of us" and gave "emphatic notice to the men and women in our armed forces that the American people do not intend to let them down."

The Yellow Ribbon Program awards gold medals to today's heroes: the opportunity our parents had to step up, obtain a first-class education, and with it, get a well-paying job in the new economy.

This Veteran's Day, let's all be sure to reflect on what freedom really means, and how each of us can volunteer in service to our communities and our nation.

Carl "Tobey" Oxholm III is senior vice president of Drexel University and dean of its Sacramento Center for Graduate Studies (www.drexel.edu/sacramento). For more information on the new GI Bill, please visit www.gibill.va.gov.