

House Approves Altmire Legislation to Eliminate Medicare Part D Penalty for Millions of Seniors

(Washington, DC) - The House of Representatives voted today to approve the Children's Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act which includes provisions authored by Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-4) to eliminate the late enrollment penalty for low income seniors. In March, Congressman Altmire introduced the Relief and Elimination of the Medicare Enrollment Deadline Penalty (REMEDY) Act (H.R. 1310) and subsequently testified before the House Ways and Means Committee on the need to eliminate barriers that prevent low income seniors from signing up for prescription drug coverage. The CHAMP Act passed this evening by a vote of 225 to 204.

"Over 4 million Medicare beneficiaries, including thousands of western Pennsylvania seniors, need prescription drug coverage, but face a late enrollment penalty to get coverage through Medicare. I am very pleased Congress is acting on my bill to give seniors the relief they need by waiving this unfair penalty for lower income Medicare beneficiaries," said Rep. Altmire.

The 108th Congress created a late enrollment penalty for Medicare beneficiaries who failed to select a prescription drug plan by the end of the initial enrollment period on May 15, 2006. The penalty applies to millions of seniors despite widespread confusion about options available to beneficiaries at the onset of the program and it applies regardless of income. Currently, these beneficiaries are charged a 1% penalty for each month in which a beneficiary is not enrolled in the program and applies for as long as an individual is enrolled in a Part D plan.

"Many seniors missed the deadline when Medicare Part D was initiated because they were inundated with confusing information," said Rep. Altmire. "I introduced the REMEDY Act because seniors shouldn't be forced to continue paying a penalty for a program that Congress made far too confusing in the first place."

In addition to the inclusion of Rep. Altmire's legislation, the CHAMP Act reauthorizes SCHIP and protects coverage for 6 million children, including 179,807 in Pennsylvania, while extending health care coverage to 5 million more low-income children, covering a total of 11 million children. The Act also strengthens the Medicare program by extending the life of the Trust Fund by three years. It averts a scheduled 10 percent payment cut to physicians and ensures that patients will be able to maintain access to the Medicare provider of their choice.