

Altmire Legislation Would Prevent Unfair Punishment of Nation's Wounded Warriors

(Washington, DC) - U.S. Representative Jason Altmire (PA-4) introduced legislation to ensure that members of the armed services who are discharged as a result of combat-related wounds receive the full compensation to which they are entitled by the Department of Defense. Congressman Altmire introduced the Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act after the Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warrior, co-chaired by former Senator Bob Dole and former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, uncovered a Department of Defense rule that unfairly penalized wounded soldiers and prohibited them from receiving their full enlistment bonuses.

"Early discharge from the military due to a combat-related injury should not result in the loss of an enlistee's bonus," stated Congressman Altmire. "These brave men and women fight for us, so we should fight for them and guarantee that they receive the bonuses that they have earned and to which they are entitled."

According to Department of Defense rules, enlistees cannot receive their full enlistment bonus unless they fulfill their entire military obligation. Unfortunately, members of the armed services who are wounded while on active duty are not receiving their full bonuses because their service was prematurely cut short. The Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act, H.R. 3793, would correct this problem by requiring the Department of Defense to provide veterans who have been discharged due to combat-related wounds with full payment of remaining bonuses within 30 days of discharge. This will ensure that America's wounded warriors receive the full compensation promised to them. Lead co-sponsors of the bill are Reps. Walter B. Jones (R-NC) and Patrick Murphy (D-PA), members of the House Armed Service Committee and Rep. Cliff Stearns (R-FL), a member of the House Veterans Committee.

"The Non Commissioned Officers Association (NCOA) believes that [Rep. Altmire's] legislation corrects a gross inequity in military career bonus programs," wrote Richard C. Schneider, NCOA's Executive Director for Government Affairs, in an October 9 letter. "It simply is absurd under current law to terminate such bonuses for those retired or separated due to a combat-related injury."

Paul Rieckhoff, Executive Director of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, added, "The bottom line is that these wounded veterans have earned their bonuses by answering the call of our nation. It is critical that the Department of Defense stop penalizing wounded troops for their injuries. This gap in the current system was highlighted by the Dole-Shalala Commission, and the Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act is the appropriate fix to this problem."

The Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act is also supported by the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) and Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

The Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act takes another step toward implementation of Dole-Shalala Commission's July report recommendations which already echoed two bills previously sponsored by Congressman Altmire: ensuring the proper screening and treatment of traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and amending the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to allow spouses and parents of seriously wounded veterans to take leave. Both measures passed the House earlier this year.