

Altmire Introduces Bill to Improve Veterans' Health Care

(Washington, DC) - Rep. Jason Altmire (PA-4) introduced bipartisan legislation to ensure the proper screening and treatment of traumatic brain injuries (TBI) for America's returning veterans. The Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Act, H.R. 1944, would require the Veterans Affairs Administration to institute a program to screen veterans for symptoms of TBI; develop and operate a comprehensive program of long-term care for post-acute TBI rehabilitation; establish a TBI transition office at each of the 21 polytrauma network sites nationwide; and create and maintain a TBI veteran health registry. This legislation is a continuation of Rep. Altmire's advocacy on behalf of the nation's veterans.

"More than 24,000 American troops have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of whom have sustained multiple injuries due to confronting suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices," said Rep. Altmire. "More than half of combat casualties in Iraq have associated brain injuries. Most of them include mild TBI, which often goes undiagnosed and is subsequently left untreated."

According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Strokes, TBI occurs when a sudden trauma causes damage to the brain. Symptoms of TBI vary depending on the extent of damage to the brain, but include headaches, confusion, dizziness, blurred vision, fatigue, and behavioral and mood changes. Cases of mild TBI are under-diagnosed, especially when a service member has an external injury such as a burn or other life-threatening condition that requires immediate medical attention.

"Traumatic brain injury has become the signature injury of both Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Among veterans and service members returning from combat overseas, 65 percent have TBI," said Rep. Altmire. "The Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Act will help the VA better coordinate care for our wounded warriors to ensure that veterans are properly screened, diagnosed and receive the treatment that they deserve."