

## Altmire to Army: Policy Does Not Go Far Enough

(Washington, DC) - Today, U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-4) responded to an announcement this morning by a top Army official that soldiers wounded in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will not be asked to recoup their enlistment bonuses. It is unclear how this announcement will affect the payment of bonuses in other military service branches. The Army announcement came on the heels of reports by wounded servicemen and women, including Private First Class Jordan Fox of Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, that they were receiving collection notices from the military demanding repayment of bonuses paid for enlisting in the Armed Services. Last month, Congressman Altmire introduced the Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act ( H.R. 3793) to ensure that members of the military receive the full compensation that they are entitled to by the Department of Defense after the Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors, 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. Congressman Altmire's bill is currently the only legislation in the U.S. House or Senate to address this specific problem.

"I am happy that we were able to get the Army to reconsider PFC Fox's bonus denial. This situation was outrageous and should never have come to this in the first place," said Congressman Altmire. "I am heartened by Brigadier General Michael S. Tucker's announcement of the Army's policy that it will not ask for repayment of bonuses paid to those soldiers who are injured in the line of duty. However, I am disappointed that the policy does not go further by stating that wounded soldiers will also receive the remaining balance of future bonus payments. It is preposterous for our government to have a policy that says that a soldier who has sustained serious injuries in the field of battle has not fulfilled his or her service obligation. My legislation, the Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act, will ensure that all soldiers injured in the line of duty not only keep the bonuses already paid to them, but that they also receive every penny that they have rightfully earned and deserve by guaranteeing future bonus payments they would have received had they been healthy enough to finish their service obligation."

Congressman Altmire added, "It is unconscionable that the military punish our wounded warriors by refusing the payment of their bonuses after they have made such sacrifices for our nation. I am determined to continue pushing my legislation to ensure that soldiers injured in the line of duty are treated with the same care and respect as those who are physically able to complete their military service."

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 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.

The Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act is also supported by the Military Coalition, the Non Commissioned Officers Association, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA), and Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

The Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act takes another step toward implementation of the Dole-Shalala Commission's July 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 family members of seriously wounded veterans to take leave. Both measures passed the House earlier this year.

