

Two Altmire Measures to Improve Care for Veterans, Military Families Become Law

(Washington, DC) - Today, two measures authored by Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-4) to deliver much-needed assistance to veterans and military families were signed into law by President Bush as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2008 (H.R. 4986). Altmire's provisions will ensure the proper treatment of traumatic brain injuries (TBI) sustained by veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and will help military families handle issues that arise from a soldier's deployment.

Congressman Altmire originally introduced the Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Act (H.R. 1944) in April to improve treatment for veterans suffering from TBI, which is often called the signature injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This measure requires the Veterans Administration to screen all veterans for symptoms, operate a comprehensive program of long-term care for TBI rehabilitation and create and maintain a TBI veteran health registry.

"The proliferation of roadside bombs in Iraq and Afghanistan has left many veterans with traumatic brain injuries, far too many of which have gone undiagnosed and untreated," Altmire said. "My provision, which strengthens TBI screening and treatment, will help ensure America's wounded warriors receive the medical treatment they need and deserve."

"This work by Congressman Altmire and his colleagues is critical to improving care and quality of life for our nation's heroes," said Dr. Ross D. Zafonte, Head of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Harvard Medical School and a leading expert on TBI. "This legislation will make a substantial difference in the rehabilitation of veterans with TBI, and Congressman Altmire should be congratulated for his work in this area."

The second measure, an amendment offered by Congressman Altmire and Congressman Tom Udall (NM-3), will allow military families to use Family and Medical Leave time to manage issues, such as child care and financial planning, that arise as the result of the deployment of a spouse, parent, or child.

"By extending the Family Medical Leave Act to military families, my provision will help parents, spouses and children take care of a number of issues that arise when a loved one is deployed," Altmire said. "America's soldiers and their families have made enormous sacrifices to protect our country. Any step we can take to help them overcome the challenges they face before, during and after deployment is a step in the right direction."

Additional provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 1585) signed today include:

- A 3.5 percent pay raise for military service members;

- Provisions of the Wounded Warrior Act which establish new requirements providing the people, training and oversight mechanisms needed to restore confidence in the quality of care and services received by wounded warriors and their families; and,

- Critical investments to prevent the occurrence of another Walter Reed-type scandal.