

House Passes Altmire Provision to Help Colleges Meet Emerging Workforce Needs

(Washington, DC) - Today, U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-4) joined a bi-partisan coalition in passing the College Opportunity and Affordability Act (H.R. 4137), legislation that will rein in rising college costs, increase accountability among student loan programs and strengthen the competitiveness of America's workforce. The bill included four provisions authored by Congressman Altmire. The first measure will help community colleges better prepare students to meet local businesses' hiring needs. A second measure - proposed by Congressman Altmire and Congressman Tim Ryan (OH-17) - will create a text-book rental program to save students money. The College Opportunity and Affordability Act passed by a vote of 354-58.

"Today, the House took steps to make college more affordable for millions of American families by passing a bill that will rein in escalating tuition costs, improve accountability in the student loan industry, and further bolster student aid," Altmire said. "A college degree is more valuable today than ever before. We cannot afford to let spiraling costs put a college education beyond the reach of America's working families. Making college more accessible to all Americans is fundamental to maintaining our competitive edge in the global economy."

In Pennsylvania, a recent study found that 82 percent of employers are having trouble hiring qualified workers. Congressman Altmire's amendment would create Business Workforce Partnership grants to fund partnerships between community colleges and employers to develop and align credit-bearing college courses with local businesses' workforce needs. Along with coursework offerings adapted to fit workers' schedules, Altmire's measure will help community colleges expand worksite learning opportunities and provide assistance with job placements. Congressman Altmire's measure is supported by the Community College of Allegheny County, Butler County Community College, the American Association of Community Colleges, Workforce Alliance, and the Center for Law and Social Policy.

"Local businesses in a wide variety of industries, including advanced manufacturing, information technology, nursing, and child care, are facing workforce shortages," Altmire said. "By better tailoring community college coursework to meet emerging workforce needs, we can prepare students to succeed in the job market and supply local businesses with the talent they need to continue growing."

"We believe that Congressman Altmire's amendment will help build partnerships between community colleges and local businesses to help ensure students learn the skills necessary to enter the local employment market," President of Community College of Allegheny County Michael T. Murphy, Ed. D. said in a letter. "By making resources available to develop workforce training courses on the for-credit side of community colleges, Congressman Altmire's amendment will allow students enrolled in these courses to receive financial aid and to earn credits towards a degree. This will increase access to workforce training programs and encourage students to continue their education."

Along with Congressman Tim Ryan, Congressman Altmire also included a measure in today's legislation to help students cover high textbook costs. Surveys show that students now spend an average of \$1,000 per year on college textbooks. The Ryan-Altmire measure would create a pilot program to award 10 competitive grants to establish textbook rental programs, which could reduce students' textbook expenses by up to 75 percent. It is estimated students would save more money by using textbook rental programs than they do by buying books over the internet.

"Spending hundreds of dollars on textbooks each semester is a huge financial burden for most college students," Altmire

said. "These textbook rental programs will help students purchase the books they need without emptying their bank accounts."

The College Opportunity and Affordability Act also included the following reforms to make college more accessible to American families.

- Reins in tuition price increases by providing incentives to encourage colleges to hold down price increases and creating mechanisms to hold colleges and universities accountable for tuition hikes;

- Restores integrity and accountability to the student loan programs by providing students with fair and full information about their borrowing options and protecting students from aggressive marketing practices; and,

- Increases college aid and support for veterans and military families by creating a new scholarship program for active duty military personnel and family members.