

Altmire: Congress' Record Investment in Veterans Care Becomes a Reality

(Washington, DC) - Today, U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-4) welcomed the President's release of \$3.7 billion that Congress included in its FY 2008 budget to improve care for veterans. This is the largest single funding increase in the 77-year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). At a time when the Department of Veterans Affairs is struggling to meet Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans' growing need for services, this funding will help ensure that America's heroes receive the care they deserve.

"From day one, my top priority has been to make sure that no one stands in front of our nation's veterans when it comes to our federal budget decisions," Altmire said. "This historic increase in funding for veterans health care will help our VA system meet new challenges and improve the ability of local facilities to meet the needs of America's heroes. This funding shows that Congress is committed to taking action to honor our veterans."

With the release of today's funds, the 110th Congress has provided \$6.7 billion in additional funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs. These funds will strengthen quality health care for 5.8 million patients, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans; invest in much-needed maintenance for VA health care facilities; improve treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury for returning veterans; and add 1,800 claims processors to reduce the backlog of 400,000 claims from veterans waiting for their earned benefits.

Congressman Altmire has worked tirelessly to meet our veterans' needs during this Congress. He introduced the following four key initiatives to improve veterans' health care and financial security. All of these bills have passed both the House and the Senate.

- The Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act (H.R. 3793) ensures that veterans are not denied their full enlistment bonus if service-related injuries prevent them from completing their service commitment. Numerous news reports have profiled veterans like Mt. Lebanon resident Jordan Fox, who was asked to repay a portion of his bonus because service-related injuries ended his military career.
- The Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Treatment Act (H.R. 1944) improves treatment for veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with traumatic brain injuries (TBI), the signature injury of these conflicts.
- Military Reservist and Veteran Small Business Reauthorization and Opportunity Act (H.R. 4253) expands the funding and support available to veterans pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities and makes it easier for reservists to secure loans that can help keep their businesses afloat while they fight for our country.
- Active Duty Military Tax Relief Act (H.R. 3827) provides tax relief to active duty military service members and helps small businesses meet challenges created when valued employees leave for their tour of duty.

"The commitment of America's veterans to protecting our country is unparalleled," Altmire said. "This is why I have introduced legislation to improve veterans' health care and increase their opportunities for economic success. Each of my bills is a step forward in meeting our nation's moral obligation to care for those who have bravely fought for us."