

## Bill Would Give Wounded Vets Full Re-Up Cash

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By Rick Maze

(Washington, DC) - Injured combat veterans would receive full payment of any re-enlistment or retention bonuses, even if they are unable to fulfill their service obligation, under a bill introduced by Rep. Jason Altmire, D-Pa.

The bill, HR 3793, is called the Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act, is aimed at what Altmire described as a flaw in bonus policy uncovered by the Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors.

Defense Department rules require installment payments for re-enlistment bonuses to be terminated if someone cannot continue their military service. As a result, someone hurt in combat after re-enlisting would receive their initial down payment, typically half of the total bonus, but may not receive the annual installments if their war wounds make it impossible to continue service.

Under the bill, the full bonus would be paid to a veteran within 30 days of his separation from active duty if he was unable to continue serving as a result of combat injury or illness. This would not change the military's policy of denying full bonuses to those unable to fulfill their service obligation for other reasons.

The fate of the bill, which was introduced Wednesday, is not clear. Congress is just starting to review the recommendations of the Wounded Warriors commission, but lawmakers have warned that the issues of medical treatment, disability review, benefits for the wounded and their families, and transition from military to civilian life for the severely injured are so complex that it will take time to come up with a legislative plan.

"Early discharge from the military due to a combat-related injury should not result in the loss of an enlistee's bonus," Altmire said in a statement. "These brave men and women fight for us, so we should fight for them and guarantee that they receive the bonuses that they have earned and to which they are entitled."

Altmire's bill is co-sponsored by Reps. Walter B. Jones, R-N.C., and Patrick Murphy, D-Pa., who are both members of the House Armed Services Committee, and by Rep. Cliff Stearns, R-Fla., a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

The Non Commissioned Officers Association, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans and Blinded Veterans of America support the bill.

Richard Schneider of NCOA said the bill would correct a "gross inequity" in bonus policy. "It simply is absurd under current law to terminate such bonuses for those retired or separated due to a combat-related injury," Schneider said in a letter Tuesday endorsing the bill.