

PA politicians send some holiday love to veterans

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(Washington, DC) - Congress is scrambling to finish its work as the holiday recess approaches, and help for veterans is high on the "to do" list, especially among Pennsylvania lawmakers.

Today, the Senate approved the National Defense Authorization Act, which included \$251 million in higher education aid for former members of the Reserves and National Guard. The provision was inserted by Rep. Chris Carney, a freshman Democrat from northeastern Pennsylvania. Sen. Bob Casey sponsored the Senate version.

Former reservists and national guardsmen would have up to 10 years to use the money, which would be allocated based on tuition costs. Each veteran would have to have served in Afghanistan or Iraq for at least 90 days.

"It's just the new nature of the warfare we're facing," Mr. Carney said. "It requires the guards and reserves to step up and deploy more often."

That makes them more deserving of federal education aid, he said.

The defense authorization bill also contains two measures from Sen. Jason Altmire, D-McCandless: one would enhance treatment of traumatic brain injuries suffered by soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan and another would help soldiers' families cope with financial and other burdens of extended deployments.

On Monday, the House is expected to vote on an Altmire bill that would prevent the military from asking soldiers to repay their sign-up bonuses if they have to leave military service early because of injuries on the battlefield.