

Altmire, Murphy hold town-hall meeting

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"We don't care if you have a 'D' or an 'R' next to your name, we care if you have good ideas," said Altmire, D-4, McCandless Township, ticking off the local issues, such as keeping a commissary for veterans open in Collier Township and upgrading locks and dams, he and Murphy, R-18, Upper St. Clair Township, have partnered on.

"Jason and I work together on a lot of things," said Murphy, adding that Democrats and Republicans disagree on how to solve the nation's problems, "but we ought to agree on where we're going."

The first town-hall meeting involving the two congressmen with neighboring districts was held Tuesday in Monroeville. Altmire's district encompasses all of Beaver County except for two small precincts, which are in Murphy's district.

Many of the 70 people in Penn State-Beaver's student-union auditorium submitted written questions about issues ranging from gas prices to illegal immigration, health care to Iraq.

Besides reining in oil speculators, Altmire said Congress should force oil companies to drill on land they already lease or rent in America rather than open new areas of exploration that wouldn't produce any oil for a decade.

Rather than focus on finding more domestic oil, Altmire said he'd rather spend the next 10 years having the best minds in the country develop alternative fuel sources. "I want to get us off of oil," he said. "We can not continue to depend on oil."

Altmire also said the Pittsburgh region could be a major force in an expanding nuclear energy industry and he called this area the "Saudi Arabia of coal."

Comparing the search for oil alternatives to America launching its space program, Murphy said discovering sustainable energy is, "The Apollo project of our generation."

Oil drilling in American waters can be done safely and should be encouraged, he said. "Other countries are drilling off their coasts," Murphy said.

Both Altmire and Murphy said they oppose allowing illegal immigrants to become citizens. "That is never going to happen as long as I'm in Congress," Altmire vowed.

In response to a question about veterans, Altmire said that Congress is ripe for criticism, but, "You can not criticize the work that we've done on veterans."

Congress, he said, has increased funding for veterans' health care and college tuition, and extended tax breaks and Family Medical Leave Act coverage to military families.

Also, Murphy and Altmire said it's time for the Iraqi government and military to take control of their own country. "They don't need our soldiers holding their hand," said Murphy, who has visited Iraq three times.