

Altmire Urges President Bush to Change Policy on White House Tours for Gold Star Families

(Washington, DC) - In a letter Wednesday to President Bush, U.S. Representative Jason Altmire (PA-4) questioned White House policy regarding tours for Gold Star Families' the spouses, parents, and children of those killed in action while serving in the United States Armed Forces. Congressman Altmire raised concerns that the White House policy unfairly differentiates between Gold Star families of the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and those whose family members served the nation in previous eras. Currently, preferential treatment in scheduling White House tours - which typically must be booked up to six months in advance - is extended only to Gold Star families of soldiers killed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Congressman Altmire urged President Bush to revise this policy and to provide every Gold Star family with the opportunity to tour the White House, regardless of when their loved ones served in the military.

The policy came to the attention of Congressman Altmire earlier this month when Allys Boyer, an 84-year-old constituent from Ellwood City, requested help from his office in scheduling a June 28 tour of the White House. Ms. Boyer is a Gold Star mother whose son, Cpl. Larry Boyer, United States Marine Corps, was killed in action on May 25, 1969 while on patrol in Vietnam. Her visit to Washington D.C. with her two daughters, Sandra Lee Boyer of Zelenople and Beverly Boyer of Arizona, will be their first visit to Washington D.C. as a family and will mark Ms. Boyer's first visit to the Vietnam Memorial to see her son's name. The White House initially told Congressman Altmire's office that such a tour was possible, considering Ms. Boyer's status as a Gold Star mother. However, after receiving clarification that Ms. Boyer's son was killed in Vietnam, the White House denied the tour request stating that such tours are only granted to Gold Star families of soldiers killed during the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In his June 27 letter to the president, Congressman Altmire urged the White House to revise its policy and grant tours of the White House requested by all Gold Star families, regardless of when their loved ones were killed. He explained, "It seems outrageous to implement a policy that values one service member's family's sacrifices over others. Even after many decades, the pain of the family of a soldier killed while serving his or her country does not dim. At the very least, mothers such as Ms. Boyer deserve the opportunity to visit the White House, one of the symbols of the freedom and democracy which her son lost his life defending."

"There is no way to repay our debt to the families of those who perish while defending our nation," added Congressman Altmire. "Allowing them the privilege of visiting this historic site in our nation's capital is the least we can do as a nation to express our appreciation for their sacrifice."

As a Member of Congress, Rep. Altmire may personally take small groups to gain entrance to White House tours. For the first time, he took advantage of this seldom-used rule this morning to grant Ms. Boyer and her daughters their request to tour the White House.

In addition to visiting the White House and the Vietnam Memorial during their two-day visit to Washington, D.C., the Boyers will also receive a tour of the U.S. Capitol by Congressman Altmire's staff.