

Altmire Votes to Improve Homeland Security

(Washington, DC) - U.S. Representative Jason Altmire voted today to approve critical funding to improve the nation's homeland security and implement the recommendations of the 9/11 commission. The Homeland Security Appropriations bill passed in the U.S. House of Representatives by a bipartisan vote of 268 to 150. The legislation fills key gaps in our nation's homeland security by providing additional border patrol agents throughout the country, mandating additional training and equipment for emergency first responders, and improving aviation and port security.

"This bill devotes substantial resources to secure our borders against potential terrorists and to help stop the growing flood of illegal immigrants entering our country each day," said Congressman Altmire. "Increased border security is the first step in improving our nation's security as a whole. The Democratic Congress has taken responsibility for implementing key recommendations of the 9/11 Commission that have for too long been ignored by this administration and the Republican party."

According to Congressman Altmire, the bill will provide for 3,000 new border patrol agents, bringing the total number of agents to nearly 18,000 by the end of FY 2008. It will also address a glaring oversight in our government's immigration policies by requiring that the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency regularly obtain information from the nation's correctional facilities in order to identify incarcerated illegal immigrants who are subject to deportation after completing their prison terms. The measure also includes a necessary \$1 billion for fencing, infrastructure and technology along the U.S.-Mexico border.

In February, Congressman Altmire testified before the House Committee on the Budget to criticize the president's proposed \$1 billion cuts to homeland security and to emphasize the need to restore critical funding to emergency responders. Today's bill will instead expand support for emergency responders through equipment and training grants to local law enforcement personnel and firefighters. The bill also makes a strong commitment to improving long-neglected port security by providing \$400 million in grants to improve critical port facilities and infrastructure. In addition, it provides funding for key recommendations of the 9/11 Commission to improve aviation security by substantially increasing efforts to purchase and install the latest explosive detection systems for checked baggage at airports and to double the amount of cargo screened on passenger aircraft.

The Homeland Security Appropriations bill includes strong oversight measures to ensure careful spending of taxpayer dollars by the Department of Homeland Security and eliminates wasteful no-bid contracts.

"Today's Homeland Security Appropriations bill gives the brave men and women who respond to emergencies the tools and resources they need to protect our communities," added Congressman Altmire. "This legislation will make an important and substantial investment in the long-term security of our country, while ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent the right way."