

(Washington, DC) - U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-4) introduced legislation on Wednesday to make critical improvements to the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program, which helps workers displaced by foreign competition to receive re-training and transition into new careers. The Trade Adjustment Assistance Improvement Act, H.R. 3801, extends the TAA program to service industry workers; makes training, healthcare, and wage insurance benefits more accessible; creates a new TAA program that addresses the needs of communities; and reauthorizes TAA programs for an additional five years. The lead sponsor of the bill is Congressman Adam Smith of Washington.

“Since 2000, Pennsylvania has lost 210,000 manufacturing jobs as a result of unfair trade agreements and, while the Department of Labor provides displaced workers with assistance through the TAA program, it has failed to meet the needs of Pennsylvania’s working families,” said Congressman Altmire, a member of the House Education and Labor Committee. **“The TAA Improvement Act will make critical reforms to the program in order to help re-train workers and provide them with new skills necessary to transition back into the workforce.”**

Earlier this year, Congressman Altmire appeared along with John Bolas, a Beaver County resident and former TAA participant, before the House Ways and Means Committee. The June 14 hearing on “Promoting U.S. Worker Competitiveness in a Globalized Economy” examined the TAA program and ideas to reform the program in order to meet its intended goal. At the hearing, Mr. Bolas discussed his experience with the TAA program.

“I have a hopeful future because of the TAA program,” said John Bolas of Beaver County, who was retrained through the program as an occupational therapist after he was laid off by Anchor Hocking Specialty Glass Company in 2005. **“The TAA program helps dislocated workers like me to make a better future for our families and ourselves. As a worker in the glass and construction industries, I never earned more than \$25,000 a year. Now, I expect to start at more than \$35,000 a year with benefits.”**

The TAA program is a critical component of responding to the loss of jobs among hard-working Americans and promoting the competitiveness of the American workforce. First enacted in

1962, the TAA program was designed to assist workers dislocated due to government policies that eliminated tariffs and other barriers to trade. However, under current law, the program extends coverage only to workers in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, even though service sector jobs also are increasingly moving overseas.

The TAA Improvement Act would:

- Extend TAA benefits to service-sector employees and to workers affected by trade with non-FTA partner countries;
 - Double the current training funding cap from \$220 million to \$440 million, and build in a mechanism to ensure that benefits are accessible for all eligible workers;
 - Increase the health care premium subsidy to 85%;
 - Simplify the application process by authorizing the Secretary of Labor to certify groups of workers as eligible for TAA on an industry-wide basis in addition to a plant-by-plant basis;

- Establish a \$300 million "TAA for Communities" program to assist communities heavily impacted by trade-related displacement through a coordinated federal effort; and,
 - Triple the "TAA for Firms" program to \$50 million in order to address the substantial backlog of approved projects.