

(Washington, DC) - U.S. Representative Jason Altmire (PA-4) sponsored an amendment with Rep. Tom Udall (NM-3) to the FY 2008 Defense Authorization Bill (H.R. 1585) that would ease the burden on military families struggling to balance new responsibilities brought on by deployments. The Altmire-Udall Amendment allows spouses, parents, or children of military personnel who are currently serving or are called to active duty to use their Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) benefits for issues arising from deployment.

"Ongoing military engagements and extended military deployments impact not only our troops, but also the families of our brave men and women in uniform," said Congressman Altmire.

"Military families are trying to balance everything from their financial obligations to child care. I offered this amendment to help ease the burden on military families who are struggling to balance these new responsibilities during long deployments."

"Supporting the troops means more than just putting a sticker on your bumper," said Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. **"We owe it to our troops to do everything we can to ensure that their families are taken care of while they are serving our country. Congressman Altmire's legislation would make a big difference in the lives of families who are struggling to balance the demands of work and home life while a parent or other loved one is deployed."**

The amendment does not increase the amount of FMLA time available or expand eligibility to employees not already covered by FMLA or to active duty military personnel. It simply allows eligible immediate family of service members to use FMLA benefits in one additional set of circumstances to deal with issues directly related to or resulting from the deployment of a family member. For example, the wife of a recently deployed service member could use FMLA time to arrange for child care; the parents of a deployed service member could take FMLA time to see their child off or welcome him or her home; or the husband of a service member could use FMLA time to attend pre-deployment briefings, family support meetings and reintegration briefings.

The Altmire-Udall amendment has been endorsed by the National Military Families Association, the Military Officers Association of America, and the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States.

The Altmire-Udall amendment passed with bipartisan support by voice vote on Wednesday night. The amendment was attached to H.R. 1585, the FY 2008 Defense Authorization Bill, which passed today by a vote of 397 to 27. In addition to expanding FMLA to military families, H.R. 1585 authorizes \$503.8 billion in budget authority for the Department of Defense (DoD) and the national security programs of the Department of Energy (DoE). It also provides for \$141.8 billion to support ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan during FY 2008. H.R. 1585 will:

- Provide essential military equipment and training for our troops by authorizing \$13.6 billion for the Army and \$8.4 billion for the Marine Corps to address equipment reset requirements, and \$250 million to address department-wide training shortfalls;
- Upgrade military health care for our troops and military retirees by prohibiting fee increases in TRICARE and the TRICARE pharmacy program for service members and retirees. It includes the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act, previously passed by the House on March 28, which improves care for our injured soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. It also restores more than 2,300 medical personnel positions and fully funds the Defense Health Program facility maintenance, particularly at Walter Reed;
- Give the military a pay raise of 3.5 percent - 0.5 percent more than the President's budget request;
- Create a \$1 billion Strategic Readiness Fund to give DoD the ability to rapidly address equipment shortfalls. It also establishes a Defense Readiness Production Board to identify critical readiness requirements and to mobilize the defense industrial base to speed up the production of military equipment; and
- Strengthen the strained National Guard by providing \$1 billion to address shortfalls in National Guard and Reserve equipment. It gives the National Guard enhanced authority to fulfill its expanded role in the nation's defense, by authorizing a fourth star for the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, making the National Guard Bureau a joint activity of the Department of Defense. It also requires evaluation and reporting on the preparedness of the National Guard for homeland security missions, such as disaster response.

"The Defense Reauthorization Bill will provide our troops overseas with the best gear and force protection possible," said Congressman Altmire. **"Under the bill, our troops will get better health care, better pay, and the benefits and support they have earned and deserve."**