

(Washington, DC) - Rep. Jason Altmire (PA-4) announced that he has introduced legislation to provide relief to millions of Medicare Part D beneficiaries by repealing the late enrollment penalty it currently imposes on senior citizens. Rep. Altmire made the announcement during roundtable discussions today in Ellwood City and Mars with senior citizens, family members and agency representatives who work daily with Medicare beneficiaries.

Rep. Altmire introduced the legislation on Wednesday with Rep. Steve Kagen, M.D. (WI-8). The Kagen-Altmire bill will provide relief to millions of Medicare beneficiaries who were penalized for not signing up on time for prescription drug coverage under the Medicare Part D program.

"When the Medicare Part D prescription drug plan was initiated at the beginning of 2006, Medicare beneficiaries were inundated with information about coverage options, which caused confusion and often frustration among seniors," said Rep. Altmire. **"Those who did not sign up for the plan during the initial enrollment period were slapped with a late enrollment penalty, in addition to their regular monthly premium."**

The late enrollment penalty is approximately 1% of the average monthly premium multiplied by the number of months an individual delays enrolling. The penalty applies for as long as the beneficiary is enrolled in Part D and the amount is expected to increase each year.

"It is unfair to punish seniors for taking the time necessary to make the right decision about their health care," concluded Rep. Altmire. **"Choosing your health care coverage is one of the most important decisions you can make. It determines your access to hospitals, doctors, and health care services. Imposing the late enrollment penalty potentially rushes seniors into making poor decisions when determining their coverage and it is an unnecessary financial burden for those who live on a fixed income."**