

(West View, PA) -- U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) held a press conference today with firefighters at the Keating Fire Company in West View to discuss his ongoing efforts to help first responders protect their communities. Congressman Altmire recently helped introduce the Supporting Emergency Responders Volunteer Efforts Act (SERVE Act – H.R. 5700), which would provide volunteer firefighters and emergency service workers with a \$1,000 tax credit. This tax credit could help bolster recruitment efforts among fire departments struggling with declining numbers.

“Western Pennsylvania’s fire departments are largely staffed by volunteers who dedicate countless hours to keeping our communities safe,” Altmire said. **“Honoring these brave men and women by providing them with a \$1000 tax credit is not only the right thing to do, it is a smart policy that will be a valuable recruitment tool for fire companies with declining numbers.”**

Volunteer firefighters make up over 72 percent of America’s fire service. However, over the past 30 years, volunteer firefighters’ enlistment has greatly declined. According to Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, Pennsylvania went from having about 3,000 volunteer companies with 300,000 firefighters in 1976 to having fewer than 2,400 companies and only 72,000 firefighters in 2005.

“As a Fire Marshal, I have seen firsthand how hard it can be to recruit new volunteer firefighters and retain current ones,” John Reubi, Fire Marshal and Emergency Management Coordinator for Ross Township said. **“Being able to tell volunteers they could receive a \$1,000 tax credit if they join our department would be a great boost to our recruitment efforts. I want to thank Congressman Altmire for once again showing that he understands our fire departments’ needs and is committed to passing legislation that can make our operations stronger.”**

The SERVE Act is the latest in a long line of initiatives Congressman Altmire has undertaken to improve resources for local fire departments. Congressman Altmire also co-sponsored the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (H.R. 943), which would prevent the IRS from taxing compensation and benefits provided to volunteer firefighters for their service.

Congressman Altmire has held three workshops to help local fire departments apply for funding from the Department of Homeland Security’s Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program so they can buy new equipment and upgrade facilities. Last year, 26 fire and emergency responder departments in Congressman Altmire’s district received more than \$1.5 million in AFG funding.

Congressman Altmire also successfully protected funding for the AFG program when the president proposed cutting it by 60 percent - \$450 million – earlier this year. Had this proposal gone forward, Pennsylvania would have received \$39 million less in AFG funding, meaning roughly 434 fewer grants would be distributed statewide.