

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) and U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) today introduced legislation to help volunteer fire companies cover the rising cost of fuel prices. The Supporting America’s Volunteer Emergency Services Act of 2008 (SAVES Act) would establish a federal grant program to help volunteer fire companies pay to fuel fire trucks and emergency response vehicles.

“High gas prices are taking a tremendous toll on volunteer fire departments, many of whom are the only emergency service providers for their areas,” Altmire said. **“I am introducing this bill because I want to make sure that high fuel costs do not prevent volunteer fire departments from continuing to protect our communities and investing in the training and equipment needed to provide quality emergency services. We cannot afford to let high gas prices stand in the way of firefighters’ ability to provide local families with the help they need.”**

“High gas and diesel prices have put a strain on millions of Americans, particularly those operating on razor-thin budgets like our volunteer fire companies,” said Senator Casey. **“Many companies are finding it difficult to cope with the added strain, making it impossible for them to respond to emergencies with enough equipment and vehicles. Volunteer companies save Pennsylvania taxpayers and towns millions of dollars every year, so this is an investment in their future and ours. We must help our firefighters so they aren’t forced to choose between their budgets and saving lives.”**

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The SAVES Act would set a baseline of gas and diesel prices using average prices from 2007. Volunteer fire companies would be eligible for reimbursement of 75% of budget overages due to the rising cost of gas over the baseline cost. The companies would then receive a grant to help cover the additional costs. For example, a volunteer fire company that uses 1,000 gallons of gasoline and 700 gallons of diesel under current levels would receive approximately \$1,725.00 in reimbursements under this program.

Between June 2003 and June 2008, regular gasoline prices have risen 171% and diesel prices have risen 229%. Volunteer fire companies have reported that they are not able to respond to fire emergencies with the amount of trucks and equipment recommended under guidelines provided by the National Fire Protection Association. Volunteer Fire companies serve over 9 million Pennsylvanians and account for 97% of its fire departments.

The SAVES Act has the endorsement of Ed Mann, the Fire Commissioner for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the National Volunteer Fire Council.