

In all, four Altmire initiatives will become law as part of the Higher Education Opportunity Act

(Washington, D.C.) – A proposal introduced by U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) and Congressman Tim Ryan (OH-17) that will help lower textbook costs for college students is one of four Altmire initiatives now set to become law as part of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HR 4137). The final version of this bill passed the House today by a vote of 380-49 and is expected to pass the Senate tonight, clearing it for the president’s signature. As a member of the House Education and Labor Committee and as a member of the conference committee that worked out differences between the House and the Senate versions of this bill, Altmire played a key role in shaping this legislation.

“High textbook costs are a significant financial burden for students today. In fact, one recent study found that the average student spends approximately \$1000 a year on textbooks,” Altmire said. “That is why I worked with Congressman Tim Ryan to create a grant program that will expand the number of textbook rental programs for college students. Textbook rental programs have been already been a great success, with many of them reducing textbook costs by as much as 75 percent.”

Another Altmire initiative included in the Higher Education Opportunity Act will help community colleges better prepare students to meet local businesses’ needs. Today, students are often discouraged from participating in workforce training because they cannot receive financial aid or credit for doing so. To remedy this problem, Congressman Altmire successfully proposed an amendment that will help fund partnerships between community colleges and employers to develop college courses through which students can earn credit while they receive workforce training. The Community College of Allegheny County, Butler County Community College, and the American Association of Community Colleges have all endorsed this initiative.

“A recent study found that 82 percent of employers in Pennsylvania have trouble finding qualified workers,” Congressman Altmire said. “By better tailoring community college coursework to meet emerging workforce needs, we can prepare students to succeed in the job market and supply local businesses with the talent they need to continue growing.”

Two other Altmire initiatives that were included in this bill will provide grants for teacher preparation courses at minority-serving institutions to help improve the diversity of America’s teaching corps and require the Department of Education to accept the Department of Veterans’ Affairs certifications of total and permanent disability for loan forgiveness purposes. This will end the burdensome and duplicative process that many disabled veterans must currently go through to obtain student loan forgiveness.

The Higher Education Opportunity Act is the first reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 10 years and contains several additional provisions that will encourage colleges to rein in tuition increases, restore integrity and accountability to student loan programs, simplify the federal student aid application process, and expand college access and support for low-income and minority students.