

June 3, 2011

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) -- U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) has helped to restore funding for two federal grant programs that provide critical support to western Pennsylvania fire companies. The FY 2012 U.S. Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act (H.R. 2017) originally cut funding for the Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant programs by more than 50 percent. After Congressman Altmire spoke on the House floor about how these programs help western Pennsylvania firefighters protect their communities, the House passed an amendment that restored a significant portion of the funding at no new cost to taxpayers. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act passed last night by a vote of 231-188.

"The AFG and SAFER programs have helped dozens of western Pennsylvania fire departments equip, train, and maintain their personnel so that they are prepared to respond to any emergency," Congressman Altmire said. "As a result of the recent economic downturn and budget constraints at all levels of government, many fire departments have already been forced to cut personnel and services. By restoring funding for AFG and SAFER programs, we can help local fire companies on tight budgets obtain the resources they need to protect their communities."

There are more than 150 fire departments in Congressman Altmire's district, several of which have received AFG or SAFER grants. Earlier this year, the Berkeley Hills Fire Department in Ross Township, PA used an AFG grant to purchase an aerial ladder fire to help it protect nearby apartment complexes, retirement homes, and businesses. Just last week, the Richland Township Volunteer Fire Department received a AFG grant to purchase fire retardant suits for forty firefighters.

"The AFG grant we received will enable us to purchase the fire-retardant clothing our firefighters need to protect themselves and rescue others," Jim Kelly, Fire Chief for the Richland Township Volunteer Fire Department, said. "I don't know how the volunteer fire departments would survive without the assistance of these fire grants."

