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WASHINGTON -- The massive financial regulatory bill was signed into law just last week, but the battle over controversial swipe fees for debit and credit cards continued today at a hearing chaired by Rep. Jason Altmire, D-McCandless.

The new bill gives the federal reserve the authority to regulate debit card "interchange fees," which banks charge to merchants for each swipe. Retailers said this was a welcome step, as large banks have jacked up fees in recent years and retailers have no recourse. Banks argue that the fees are necessary to cover the costs of maintaining a global network of plastic transactions.

Mr. Altmire called the hearing of the House Small Business Committee to look into the dispute -- which he said has been the issue he heard the most about during the Wall Street reform bill debate -- and examine steps that regulators and Congress can take to manage fees in the future.

The goal, Mr. Altmire said, is to find which path will most benefit consumers.

Ronald Celaschi, of the Clearview Federal Credit Union in Moon, and Robert Oeler, president of Pittsburgh-based Dollar Bank, argued that consumers will be hit with higher fees and fewer rewards with their cards under the new bill.

"Whichever way it goes, the consumer -- whether they pay indirectly through the interchange or directly if they lose on free checking -- somehow the consumer will end up paying for this," Mr. Oeler said.

Retailers -- represented at the hearing by Jerry Buss, who owns 55 Pizza Hut franchises in Western Pennsylvania, and Chris Newton, of the Texas Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association -- claim that businesses will pass the savings from lower fees onto the consumer.

Mr. Buss cited Pizza Hut's new deal charging \$10 for any large pizza with unlimited toppings as an example of ways his stores are trying to cut prices.

Mr. Altmire said the hearing testimony will be used to create a record for other House committees and the Senate to look at if the bill needs to be altered in the future.

"We're going to see whether some of these arguments pan out or not and then we can adjust based on the testimony we've heard and make changes," he said.