

[Beaver County Times](#)

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National Guardsmen who have served domestically will now qualify for education benefits under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill after the U.S. House last week passed U.S. Rep. Jason Altmire's legislation to close a conspicuous loophole.

"I announced it to my staff, and it received cheers," said Pennsylvania National Guard Col. Grey Berrier, deputy commander of the 28th Infantry Division's 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, which includes Beaver, Allegheny and Lawrence counties.

Berrier was at a Christmas party Friday and said his troops were already discussing how the legislation, which can also assist spouses and children, would help their families.

"The one quote I heard was they couldn't have had a better Christmas gift," Berrier said.

Currently, National Guardsmen who have served overseas can qualify for education benefits under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, but those who have served in the United States do not.

Berrier said the National Guard has been deployed to airports and potential terrorist targets following Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S.-Mexico border and disaster areas such as the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina.

According to Altmire's office, the legislation could impact nearly 130,000 National Guardsmen. There are approximately 19,000 Pennsylvania National Guardsmen and 40 in Beaver County, including five on active duty, said a spokesman for the state National Guard.

Altmire, D-4, McCandless Township, said it was "outrageous" that National Guardsmen serving

domestically did not qualify for education benefits. "It's a glaring loophole," he said.

The U.S. Senate had already passed the measure and the bill should soon be signed into law by President Barack Obama, said Tess Mullen, Altmire's spokeswoman.

Altmire said the bill gained momentum earlier this year after the House passed a previous version, but the support of the American Legion and other veterans groups was "what ended up putting it over the top."

This is the seventh piece of legislation — ranging from family and medical leave issues to improving treatment for traumatic brain injuries — concerning veterans, reservists or the National Guard championed by Altmire, who is not a veteran.

Altmire said his interest in veterans' issues stems from the number of veterans in the district as well as his relationship with former U.S. Rep. Pete Peterson of Florida.

After Altmire graduated from Florida State University he worked on Peterson's campaign in 1990 and then followed the Florida representative to Washington, D.C., where Altmire worked on veterans' issues in Peterson's office.

Peterson, Altmire said, was a prisoner of war in Vietnam for more than six years and told stories of Vietnam veterans being poorly treated when they returned home from the war.

"I always thought that if I can do something about that, I'm going to," Altmire said.