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Rep. Jason Altmire, a leading advocate of veterans causes, called for more funding for homeless veterans programs in fiscal 2011 during a speech at the American Legion's annual convention Tuesday.

The Pennsylvania Democrat, who was honored at the event, said it was "outrageous" that a GOP majority last month voted not to appropriate \$75 million for 10,000 new vouchers for a program that helps homeless veterans to qualify for housing when the House debated a long-term spending bill (HR 1) to fund the federal government through fiscal 2011.

The House passed the spending measure, while the Senate rejected it.

"That was one of the things obviously everybody pointed to as having gone too far, with the level of cuts," Altmire said. "I don't know what the Senate is going to say on that. I know in the House there was an attempt to limit the dollar amount that was there. We want to continue to expand the program, because it works."

Altmire, a member of the Small Business Committee, is leading a group of Democrats in the House who strongly support appropriating more funds for the Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program.

The Republican leadership, meanwhile, is asking colleagues to wait until all of the 30,000 vouchers currently authorized by Congress have been used before funding any more. Neither side has said it would compromise on the issue as Congress continues to debate how to fund the government for the remainder of fiscal 2011.

At the convention in downtown Washington, Altmire added that he would not rule out proposing stand-alone legislation to provide the additional funds.

"I'm certainly willing to work with anybody to expand the program and make sure that the funding exists," he said. "The authorization is only one side of it. You actually have to fund the program on the other side. And I know there was some concern about whether all that money was being spent and how it was being used. But I think clearly this is a program that works, and I think we need to continue to grow the program."

Veterans groups and the Obama administration say the additional 10,000 vouchers are needed this year to end chronic homelessness among veterans by 2015. Each voucher allocates an annual allowance of up to \$7,500 each for veterans who exhibit symptoms of mental illness or are gravely disabled.

In its fiscal 2012 budget proposal, the administration requested \$939 million to boost assistance for veterans who are temporarily or chronically homeless. The request is part of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki's plan for housing every homeless veteran by 2015.

Earlier this month, Washington Democrat Patty Murray, chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said she would look for ways to include the new vouchers in fiscal 2011 spending legislation.

"We have to make tough budget cuts, we know that," Murray said. "But we shouldn't try to solve our fiscal deficit by short-changing the most vulnerable."

The Department of Veterans Affairs has estimated there are more than 100,000 veterans living on the streets. The department found that about 16 percent of homeless adults in 2009 were veterans, while 11,300 veterans ages 18 to 30 were in shelters.