

Business group lauds his efforts

By Jared Stonesifer
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CRANBERRY TWP —THE CHAMBER of Commerce said goodbye to U.S. Rep. Jason Altmire Wednesday during a luncheon to honor the outgoing politician.

Altmire served three terms representing the 4th Congressional District. That district moved to the eastern part of the state, however, as part of the redistricting process in 2010.

Altmire's territory was then absorbed into the 12th Congressional District represented by U.S. Rep. Mark Critz. The two Democratic politicians squared off in the primary election in April, where Altmire lost by a vote of 51 percent to 49 percent.

First elected in 2006, Altmire has worked closely with the business community in Cranberry throughout his six-year tenure.

Chamber Executive Director Susan Balla at the luncheon said Altmire has been a reliable advocate for transportation and infrastructure concerns while in the nation's capital.

Altmire's party affiliation never mattered to Balla or other chamber members, she said, because he could always be counted on to listen or to offer help.

"Whether he was a Democratic or Republican representative never really mattered to us," she said. "What mattered to us is that he's a friend of business."

For his part, Altmire said he'll leave office at the end of this year with no regrets about his six-year tenure in Congress.

He's most proud of the 4,734 consecutive votes he cast in the House of Representative, by far the longest streak before it ended earlier this year.

Altmire said he's also proud of the 28 bills he authored that eventually became law, nine of which dealt with veterans' issues.

The congressman also told the 30 people in attendance that he didn't always agree with them politically, but that those differences never got in the way of accomplishing great things.

"How many knock-down, drag-out debates have we had?" he said with a smile. "But in the end, we're still friends."

Altmire called himself a "free agent" now, meaning he currently has no plans on what he'll do after leaving office.

He offered several pieces of advice as a last message to members of the chamber, and pleaded with them not to sit on the sidelines for the next or any other forthcoming election. "Regardless of politics, you have to show up," he said. "If you don't pay attention you're letting someone else make decisions for you."

Bruce Mazzoni, chairman of Cranberry Township's board of supervisors, presented the congressman with a large street sign that said "Altmire Lane." Mazzoni also praised Altmire and referred to him as someone always willing and ready to work with local officials.

"Truly he represented people not just in Cranberry, but people all across the district," he said. "It's a sad day not to have Jason continue."

Balla agreed and said she won't just miss Altmire, but also his entire staff.

"We will miss all of you," she said. "I wish you were coming back, but politics is politics. It's the nature of the game."

Altmire will return to Washington, D.C. after the election on Nov. 6 to serve out the remainder of his term.

Before he left, he made it clear that being in Congress was one of the most rewarding experiences of his life. "It was an honor to have represented you."