

**SMC in Action:
Committee Meeting with Rep. Jason Altmire was “Standing Room Only”.**

Monday is usually the hardest day to get business owners to meetings. That certainly wasn't the case on November 16th, when Rep. Jason Altmire was the guest speaker at SMC's Government Relations committee. The turnout of fifty concerned business owners was a clear indication of members' level of interest about what is going in Washington, D.C.

Members clearly had his attention; Altmire was scheduled to speak for 1 hour but stretched his visit to nearly 2 hours. Altmire, one of the most knowledgeable members of the US House of Representatives on health care reform, gave a brief overview of health care reform legislation and then opened the floor to questions. He didn't miss a beat as members peppered him with a multitude of questions about health care, trade, taxes, climate change legislation, the stimulus, and so forth.

The Congressman, a fiscally conservative “Blue Dog” Democrat, was one of only 39 Democrats to cast a “NO” vote against the House's health reform bill. HB 3962 passed by a narrow margin of 220-215. When queried specifically about his “NO” vote, Altmire, said he couldn't vote for the bill because it contained only two of the three elements he deemed necessary for successful reform: insurance market reforms and coverage of the uninsured. The bill fell short on the third element - health care cost containment.

He weighed the merits of voting for the flawed bill but couldn't overcome his main objection that the bill doesn't adequately reduce health care costs and would only compound the problems of the health care system. In order to realize cost savings inefficiencies must be wrung out of the system and the reimbursement method for providers must be fundamentally changed.

When asked about the lack of tort reform in the legislation he acknowledged tort reform is a problem. He objects on ethical grounds to the government putting a value on someone's life by imposing a \$250,000 cap on pain and suffering for egregious, preventable medical errors.

He cited his opposition to employer mandates as one of the key reasons he voted against the bill. He opposes the 8% fee on employers who do not offer coverage and prefers businesses be incentivized to cover employees rather than being penalized.

When asked about tax increases to fund the health care bill, Altmire did not go on record promising no tax increases but said the bulk of revenue to pay for reform could be achieved through squeezing out inefficiencies in the system. He does not view funding reform by raising taxes on the wealthy as sound policy.

Jeff Pfeiffer, MLP Steel, stated that the economy is a huge issue and the stimulus bill had done little to help small businesses. He pointed to the serious problems facing US manufacturers including unfair trade especially from China. Altmire defended his vote for the stimulus. He cited tax cuts, depreciation measures, and new borrowing opportunities aiding small business.

He said increased funding for Small Business Administration lending programs may not be sufficient but it was a good start. The administration plans to put additional funds into

community banks to spur small business lending. Marilyn Landis, Basic Business Concepts, said small businesses are having a difficult time obtaining loans from banks and increased bank regulation is one of the chief reasons banks aren't lending more.

Brian Stein, Intersource, Inc., asked if there would be stimulus money available to make older technologies more efficient. He felt that stimulus had plenty of funds directed at new energy technologies but the US was losing sight of older core industries. He said the steel industry is now threatened by proposed "Cap and Trade" legislation. Altmire did not vote for the "Cap and Trade" bill and said he is working with Rep. Tim Ryan, Youngstown, to coordinate the funding of projects in a technology corridor

Altmire concluded with brief remarks concerning the national debt. He conceded it would take a long time to bring down the deficit given the political inertia that must be overcome to make the difficult decisions to correct the problem.