

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
House of Representatives
H-232, US Capitol
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
House of Representatives
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

April 27, 2017

As people of faith from diverse religious traditions, we all believe in the value and dignity of work. We also believe in the moral imperative to uphold promises made to workers -- both during their service, as well as in retirement.

Coal miners who have worked for decades providing for our nation's energy needs deserve to be treated with respect. Yet, without Congressional action, the health benefits of 22,600 retired coal miners and their families will expire on April 28, and a pension fund serving an even larger number of retirees and family members will be left confronting bankruptcy. It is with urgency that we call on you to pass the Miners Protection Act (MPA), which provides a solution to this crisis, as part of legislation to provide federal funding for the remainder of FY 2017.

The MPA (S. 175 / H.R. 179) is a fulfillment of promises that have already been made by our nation to coal miners and their families. The United Mine Workers of America's (UMWA) Health and Retirement Funds were created in an agreement brokered and signed by President Harry Truman in 1946. An implicit part of that agreement was an ongoing commitment by the United States government to protect the health and retirement security of mineworkers and their families. Congresses led by both parties have repeatedly recognized and acted on this unique federal role by strengthening the UMWA health and retirement funds, under both Democratic and Republican administrations

Now, in addition to the imminent termination of health benefits to retirees, the UMWA 1974 Pension Plan, the nation's largest multiemployer pension fund serving retired coal miners and their dependents -- with roughly 90,000 beneficiaries in total -- is facing bankruptcy within a decade, which would result in drastic cuts to beneficiaries' already modest pension payments. The MPA is bipartisan legislation that extends lifetime health benefits to the retirees at risk and shores up the UMWA pension plan. This is the comprehensive legislation that needs to be passed at the end of April. Please do not confuse the MPA with a separate, partisan bill that only extends health benefits and ignores coal miners' pension crisis.

It would be morally reprehensible for our government to turn its back on retired coal miners and their families. They put their health and lives on the line in coal mines, under the promised condition of lifelong healthcare and pension benefits. These retirees often have serious health problems as a direct result of their years of dangerous work in the mines.

Breaking promises of pension payments and healthcare is a form of theft. We urge you to make sure this does not happen to coal miners and their families. Now is the time to pass the Miners Protection Act and uphold our nation's values.

Sincerely,

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