

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 16, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

As negotiations continue around a short-term spending bill to avoid a government shutdown at the end of the fiscal year on October 1st, 2019, we urge you to honor the promises made to America's coal miners and include permanent protections for the retiree health care and pension benefits they earned through a lifetime of hard work as well as an extension of the coal excise tax contribution rate that expired at the end of last year, threatening the solvency of the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund.

In July, we were alarmed to learn that 1,200 retired coal miners, their widows and their dependents would lose their health care benefits at the end of the calendar year. If we don't take action now, these families in Virginia, West Virginia, Wyoming, Alabama, Colorado, North Dakota and New Mexico will begin receiving health care termination notices at the end of October. Without congressional action to keep this from happening, they will spend their holiday season worrying about whether or not they will have to choose between their life-saving medications and putting food on the table. After all they have done for our country, the least we could do is keep our end of the bargain, honor the commitments that were made, and show them that we are thankful for the sacrifices they have made for our country.

In 1946, President Harry Truman ordered Secretary of the Interior Julius Krug to broker a deal to end a nationwide strike of coal miners. The subsequent agreement with the United Mine Workers of America guaranteed healthcare and pension benefits for coal miners with the full faith and credit of the United States Government. Unfortunately, due to numerous coal company bankruptcies and fundamentally flawed bankruptcy laws that allow corporations to shed their responsibilities to their workers, these very same federally guaranteed benefits are in jeopardy today.

We are proud to cosponsor the American Miners Act (S. 27) which would protect and preserve not only these healthcare and pension benefits in perpetuity, but restore the Black Lung Trust Fund contribution rate to a much more sustainable level. During Senate consideration of the


National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the entire Democratic caucus cosponsored this bill. Unfortunately, we were blocked from even having a vote on that amendment.

We commend Speaker Pelosi and House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) for advancing legislation to secure health care and pension benefits for our nation's miners. On July 24th, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Rehabilitation for Multiemployer Pensions Act of 2019 (H.R. 397) with bipartisan support. Congress must act to ensure millions of Americans in multiemployer pension plans do not see cuts to the pension benefits they have worked hard to earn. We must pass legislation to comprehensively address both the insolvency of troubled plans and of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.


Also on July 24th, the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee of the House Natural Resources Committee held a legislative hearing on H.R. 934 and H.R. 935, bills that would permanently secure miners health care and pension benefits. The full committee is poised to vote on those bipartisan proposals this month.

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, the U.S. Senate has not taken up any relevant legislation either in committee or on the floor all year. Because this is literally a life and death issue for thousands of families across this country, we urge you to include a permanent solution for miners healthcare and pension benefits in the short-term funding package that will ensure the continued operation of the U.S. government beyond September 30th, 2019, and we stand ready to work together in a bipartisan way to keep our promises to these great American families.


Sincerely,




Joe Manchin III
United States Senator




Doug Jones
United States Senator



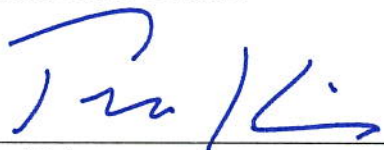
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator