

Durbin, bipartisan senators call for immediate passage of Miners Protection Act

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) joined 21 bipartisan Senators in a letter to Senate and House leadership calling for the passage of the *Miners Protection Act* by the end of this year. Without a change to current law, 12,500 of the country's retired coal miners will lose their healthcare on December 31, 2016.

“During the month of October, approximately 12,500 of our nation's retired coal miners received notices informing them that their healthcare benefits will be terminated at the end of this year. The funding provided for Patriot Retirees

Voluntary Employee's Beneficiary Association (Patriot VEBA) will be exhausted by December 31, 2016, leaving these miners and their families without the essential healthcare benefits they earned through a lifetime of hard work. On November 1st, another 3,600 miners began to receive notices. And next year, 6,500 more will suffer the same fate. Additionally, the pension fund that these miners and their widows rely on for life's basic necessities will reach the point of no return shortly thereafter. Therefore, we ask that you pass the Miners Protection Act of 2016 (S. 3470) by the end of this year," wrote the Senators.

Full text of the letter is available [here](#).

The letter was also signed by Senators Joe Manchin (D-WV), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Bob Casey (D-PA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Mark Warner (D-VA), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Al Franken (D-MN), Patty Murray (D-WA), Joe Donnelly (D-IN), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Bill Nelson (D-FL), Richard Burr (R-NC), Rob Portman (R-OH), Mark Kirk (R-IL), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Jim Risch (R-ID), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), and Jerry Moran (R-KS).

Retired miners are facing uncertainty because the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) 1974 Pension Plan is severely underfunded. Unlike other public and private pension plans, the 1974 Pension Plan was well-managed and funded prior to the 2008 financial crisis, which hit at a time when this Plan had its highest payment obligations. This – coupled with the fact that 60% of the beneficiaries are “orphan” retirees whose employers are no longer in the coal business, and the fact that there are only 10,000 active workers for 120,000 retirees – has placed the Plan on the road to insolvency. If the Plan becomes insolvent, these beneficiaries face benefit cuts and the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation will assume billions of dollars in liabilities.

To address these issues, the *Miners Protection Act* would:

- Amend the *Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act* to transfer funds in excess of the amounts needed to meet existing obligations under the Abandoned Mine Land (AML) fund to the UMWA 1974 Pension Plan to prevent its insolvency.
- Make certain retirees who lose health care benefits following the bankruptcy or insolvency of his or her employer eligible for the 1993 Benefit Plan. The assets of the Voluntary Employee Benefit Association (VEBA) created following the Patriot Coal bankruptcy would be transferred to the 1993 Benefit Plan to reduce transfers from the AML fund.