

United Mine Workers of America

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The Honorable Joe Manchin
United States Senator
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Manchin:

First, I want to commend your strong leadership and determination to passing the Miners Protection Act, S. 1714. You have repeatedly demonstrated the kind of commitment that retired miners and their dependents need in the United State Senate, and on their behalf I sincerely thank you. That battle is not over, but please know that we appreciate what you have done so far.

I also want to comment on the RECLAIM Act, which the UMWA believes will be beneficial to displaced coal miners, their families and their communities if it is passed along with the Miners Protection Act.

As you know, the RECLAIM Act will use \$1 billion currently in the Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Fund to speed up mine reclamation projects throughout Appalachia and elsewhere. This will help provide needed employment for many currently laid-off miners and others.

It is important to note that the funding for the RECLAIM Act and the Miners Protection Act do not come from the same source. RECLAIM Act money would come directly from the AML Fund; the funding for the Miners Protection Act comes from the \$490 million that is already appropriated annually from the General Treasury as part of the amendments Congress made to the Coal Act in 2006.

That is a very important point: the Miners Protection Act requires no new appropriation by the Congress. The money is already there. The money for the RECLAIM Act is already there as well, in a different pot.

I know there is some concern that the RECLAIM Act will have a negative effect on current funding for retired miners' health care provided by the UMWA Health and Retirement Funds through the Coal Act. The UMWA Funds receives interest earned from the AML Fund to

help pay for retiree health care benefits. At current interest rates, we estimate that the withdrawal of \$1 billion from the AML Fund will cause a drop of about \$100,000 per year in interest. That money will be made up, however, from the \$490 million annual appropriation – separate from the AML Fund – that is available to help pay for retiree health care benefits.

Finally, I must point out that the UMWA's support of the RECLAIM Act is predicated on the passage of the Miners Protection Act. Passing both of these acts will provide a significant boon to the coalfields at a time when palpable fear of what the future might bring is rising.

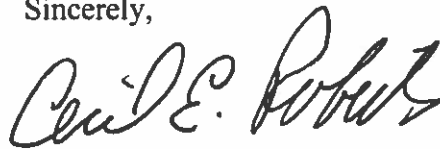
But if Congress fails to pass the Miners Protection Act this year, tens of thousands of retirees and widows will immediately lose health care benefits. That will not only cause great personal pain and distress for them, it will be another significant economic shock to the region as tens of millions of dollars in payments to hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, nursing homes, doctors, nurses, therapists and other health care workers dries up.

This will be true whether the RECLAIM Act passes or not. Indeed, passage of the RECLAIM Act without passage of the Miners Protection Act will not solve the problems that exist in the coalfields today.

The economic situation for many families and communities in the Appalachian coalfields is already catastrophic. Things will not get better by themselves. Congress needs to act this year to pass the Miners Protection Act and the RECLAIM Act, as well as other initiatives to provide job training and assistance to dislocated coal miners and their families.

Thank you again for your leadership on these and other issues that are important not just the people of West Virginia, but for working families throughout the coal-producing areas of our great nation. Please don't hesitate to call on me for any assistance I or the UMWA can provide.

Sincerely,



Cecil E. Roberts

cc: Daniel J. Kane, International Secretary-Treasurer
Bob Scaramozzino, Executive Assistant to the President
Ron Airhart, Executive Assistant to the Secretary-Treasurer
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