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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. NEUGEBAUER).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
December 7, 2016.

I hereby appoint the Honorable RANDY NEUGEBAUER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

PAUL D. RYAN,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 5, 2016, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

PROTECTING PENSIONS OF COAL MINERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. JENKINS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JENKINS of West Virginia. Mr. Speaker, miners and their widows in West Virginia and across the country are asking us to protect their pensions and health care, families like Robin Workman of Boone County, who wrote to me about how she and her husband depend on these benefits. These are the benefits that they earned.

She said: "My husband put in 35 years underground, a promise made to

them shouldn't be broken. West Virginia helped keep the lights on back then as well as today. Please don't forget about us."

This promise dates back to 1946 when the Truman administration signed an agreement with coal miners, an agreement that guaranteed their pensions and health care would be there for them when they retired. Now that agreement—no, that promise—is in jeopardy.

In just a few weeks, tens of thousands of miners and widows will lose their health insurance. These miners have back problems, knee problems, and breathing problems, all from their work in the mines. They simply cannot go without insurance.

Kenny Meade's father is one of those retired miners. He lives in Chapmanville and reached out to me to share the story of his parents. Kenny wrote about his father. He said: "He worked 31 years in the mines and often for less than other miners so he could bargain for their right to health care and pensions."

This is an issue we can fix, but it is not an issue that arose overnight. The war on coal has decimated coal jobs in West Virginia and across the country. An onslaught of overreaching Federal regulations have made it harder to mine coal and harder to burn coal. Coal-fired power plants have shut down, making electricity more expensive and reducing the market for coal.

As demand has decreased and regulations have made it harder to mine coal, mines are closing and companies are filing for bankruptcy. A company in bankruptcy isn't going to have the resources to meet its pension obligations.

All of these market forces, regulations, and the war on coal have had devastating impacts on our miners and their families. It is time for Congress to act to keep the promise and protect the benefits the miners worked their entire life to earn.

The Coal Healthcare and Pensions Protection Act won't cost taxpayers anything. It uses existing funds paid for by mining companies to provide for retired miners. This is not a tax. Taxpayers won't be on the hook for these pensions. This is about ensuring a promise made is a promise kept.

Mr. Speaker, as we approach the holiday season, I hope we will remember the retirees and widows worried about what the new year will bring. We must act now to pass a solution to this crisis to keep our word.

FAREWELL TO THE HONORABLE STEVE ISRAEL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF) for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about my friend and colleague, STEVE ISRAEL, who is retiring from Congress after 16 years. We came into Congress together and have been the best of friends and brothers ever since.

Now, the last time I mentioned STEVE ISRAEL on the House floor was after making a bet with STEVE over the Dodgers-Mets series, a bet that I lost, and I had to sing the "Meet the Mets" song on the House floor. I want to assure all my colleagues that is never going to happen again either on the playing field or on the House floor.

When we came to Congress together, we were given a book, like all incoming freshmen, called "Charting the Course." This is a book that basically says that there are three different models of being a Congressman. You can be the policy expert or you can be the political animal or you can be the pothole Congressman who is focused on district needs and excellent at meeting the needs of constituents, but the gist of the book is you can't be all three. You have to pick where you are going to make your specialization, and if you

This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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