

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXPRESSION OF APPRECIATION

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I will take one moment to express my appreciation to the people who worked extremely hard to make this bankruptcy bill a success. The 83-15 vote is a strong testament to the wisdom and the balance that this bill maintains. Some said it is not balanced and is unfair but when we had the final full debate and people voted, there was an overwhelming vote.

As the Presiding Officer knows, freedom on legislation of this kind does that large a vote result. I am pleased with that.

I am honored to have worked with Senator HATCH and Senator GRASSLEY in making this a reality. I think it is appropriate that we take just a moment to express appreciation to some people who gave extraordinary effort to make this successful conclusion a reality.

First, I note that in my office Ed Haden, who is with me today, is one of the finest legal minds in this Senate, an exceedingly hard worker, a man of integrity and ability who dedicated himself to reaching the just result of today.

I could not have been successful without Ed's leadership and assistance. Also, Brad Harris on our staff, and Sean Costello, who used to be there; Lloyd Peeples, on our staff previously, now in private practice; Kristi Lee, who preceded Ed, is now a U.S. magistrate judge. They all worked in previous years on this legislation. I know they are happy to see it come to a conclusion. I am, too.

I must note that Makan Delrahim on Senator HATCH's staff has provided tremendous leadership, as did Rene Augustine; Senator GRASSLEY's Rita Lari Jochum and Kolan Davis provided tremendous effort. Senator GRASSLEY was the original sponsor of this legislation. I must also thank Dave Hoppe and John Mashburn of Senator LOTT's office, who also worked on it significantly.

Mr. President, one more thing about this. Senator BIDEN has been a strong leader in this legislation, and he is here to speak. I have thought, from day one, there was a good concept of this bill. I have expressed my overall view of what it is about, what it attempted to do, and why I thought it was important.

I have been somewhat disappointed to see certain people in consumer groups I admire take positions that I thought were unconnected to the reality of this legislation. I am glad that after full and open hearings, now three different times have we voted here, all those issues were aired and people had the chance to have their say. I am very confident that it is good legislation that will improve the administration of justice in the Federal bankruptcy courts of America.

RADIATION EXPOSURE COMPENSATION TRUST FUND

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, today I rise to express my continued dismay with the lack of funding for the Radiation Exposure Compensation Trust Fund. Hundreds of former uranium miners, including many New Mexicans, have recently been mailed IOUs from the Department of Justice. These individuals have had their claims approved, but have been told that there is no money in the Fund to compensate them. These are former miners who are stricken with radiation-related diseases, and unfortunately, many will die soon.

We often pledge that we will never forget our Nation's veterans, who have sacrificed so much in order to secure our freedoms. But, we have forgotten the uranium miners, who also sacrificed for our nation's security while building up our nuclear arsenal. These miners endured long, dark, and dust-filled days underground. Often, the only fresh air that they breathed was what leaked out of the air compressors used to operate their jack-hammers. These miners were not even given protective masks or gloves, and they were never warned about the lethal medical risks until decades later.

These miners are afflicted with cancer and various respiratory diseases, and very few have sufficient money to pay their staggering medical bills. Most of these miners were never given the opportunity to build up a pension because they were continuously moved from one company to another. And now, while our veterans rightfully enjoy a great many benefits, these miners are left with only a depleted compensation fund and a handful of IOUs. Unfortunately, an IOU does not pay their medical bills.

I recently introduced legislation to provide \$84 million in emergency supplemental appropriations to pay for those claims that have already been approved, as well as the projected number of claims for FY2001. Because of the urgency of these claims, I will make this promise to our miners: I will introduce this legislation as an amendment to the first appropriate legislative vehicle to ensure our miners are compensated as quickly as possible.

We must replenish the trust fund immediately. Our miners have urgent health care needs and medical bills that will continue to pile up. Many miners have died without receiving any of the compensation that they were promised. Many will die without compensation, if we do not take action now. We must not break our promise to the miners who sacrificed and suffered to protect our Nation's security.

I promise today to make every effort to ensure that our miners are compensated for their sacrifice. We must make sure that they don't die with only an IOU in their hands.

I ask unanimous consent that an article from the Albuquerque Tribune be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Albuquerque Tribune, Mar. 14, 2001]

HALF-LIVES, HALF MEASURES

(By M.E. Sprengelmeyer)

They were promised government compensation, but dying former uranium miners say they get nothing but IOUs.

Richard Leavell doesn't want to die with a government IOU in his pocket.

Like his father, Merle, Leavell helped the United States fight the Cold War from the trenches of the Colorado Plateau. And like his father, he paid a high price.

The Leavells were uranium miners, helping provide the raw material America craved for its nuclear arsenal.

Only years later did the federal government tell miners about the deadly health risks they faced while blasting and digging through the hills of the Four Corners region, breathing radioactive dust that would take its toll as they aged.

After Merle Leavell was left with radiation-related lung damage, the federal government promised \$100,000 of "compassionate compensation" under a law enacted by Congress in 1990. But the check didn't arrive until after his death in 1995.

Now the same thing could happen to his son because of a funding oversight in Congress last year and a long list of unpaid government IOUs.

At 57, Richard Leavell suffers from pulmonary fibrosis and silicosis of the lungs, which leave him gasping for air and tied to expensive, ever-present bottles of oxygen.

"I can't do anything," he said. "This is no kind of life."

Last year, the government sent him a notice that he qualifies for \$100,000 compensation. "Regretfully," the letter said, there's no money to back it up.

Doctors aren't sure whether Leavell, who lives in Cortez, Colo., will live another six months or several years, but he says government officials don't seem to be in any hurry.

"They told us they accept responsibility, and this was supposed to be some kind of apology," Leavell said. "It's not much of an apology if you don't get it."

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act is in a crisis, but even an emergency fix could come too late for many of the 275 aging former miners, nuclear test participants, downwinders or their surviving spouses with unpaid IOUs.

Commonly known as RECA, the program got only \$10.8 million this fiscal year but needs at least \$84 million on top of that to pay all the claims expected to be approved in 2001.

Although Congress voted to increase each victim's compensation by \$50,000, President Bush put that on hold while he reviews virtually every new regulation approved last year. Bush also signaled he is reluctant to approve any supplemental funding requests while he focuses on a proposed \$1.6 trillion tax cut.

"Here we've got this huge surplus in Washington, D.C., and the government is sending these IOUs to people who are dying," said Rebecca Rockwell, a private investigator from Durango, Colo., who helps miners compile their claims.

"I've lost 10 of my IOU holders since October," Rockwell said. "The problem is people are dying. I've gone to about as many funerals as I can take."

Republican Sens. Pete Domenici, of Albuquerque, and Orrin Hatch, of Utah, recently introduced legislation asking for \$84 million in emergency appropriations. Rep. Scott

McInnis, a Republican whose district includes the mining county of western Colorado, plans to introduce a House version of the emergency funding bill.

However, legislative analysts say it's unlikely any new money will be approved before the summer or, more likely, at the end of the fiscal year in October.

The IOUs are worse than an embarrassment or inconvenience, said Ed Brickey, co-chairman of the Western States RECA Reform Coalition, a collection of citizen groups that are advocates for victims covered by the act.

"It has been an injustice to delay any further appropriations or the regulations because the people that have (IOUs) are dying," Brickey said.

The RECA program has long been plagued by complaints about a complex application process that often takes victims many tries and several years to clear.

The program got into its current funding mess during the 11th-hour haggling over the budget in late 2000. Ironically, it came just months after Congress amended the law to ease restrictions, cover more medical conditions, add another \$50,000 in compensation under a separate program, and allow uranium mill workers and ore transporters to qualify for the first time.

The Justice Department estimated it would take \$93 million to cover all the claims expected to be approved in fiscal 2001. But that request came too late, and when the budget was approved in December it included only \$10.8 million for the trust fund. The shortfall includes about \$23 million for those already waiting for their money.

The waiting has left many victims bitter and hopeless in the small towns of southern and western Colorado, eastern Utah and northwest New Mexico, where uranium once meant a livelihood.

These guys went underground. They would work their butts off, sometimes 10 to 16 hours a day . . . so the government could get their damned uranium," said Anna Cox of Montrose, Colo. "And how do they get repaid? They die for it, with a promissory note that maybe you'll get something . . . after you're dead."

Her 63-year-old husband, Eugene, has lung cancer. He worked 10 years in the uranium mines outside Grants in New Mexico and Naturita, Slick Rock and Gateway, Colo.

In the early days, before strict radon monitoring, companies and workers gave little regard to the health risks, he said.

"It was work, guaranteed," Eugene Cox said. "You drilled holes with a jackhammer and you shot, blasted out. Then you loaded, either with a slusher or by hand and a scoop shovel."

Dust filled the air, but workers never wore protective masks. They used gloves only if they brought their own. Some miners remember days when the only "fresh air" they breathed was what leaked out of the air compressors that ran the jackhammers.

"I was a young, healthy man," Eugene Cox said. "I did not know. It was a livelihood for me and my three children and my wife."

It took three years for Eugene Cox to verify his work history and qualify his illness for compensation. Last year, he finally got an approval letter, which explained the lack of funding and told him to wait.

"I stuck it in a box," Anna Cox said. "That's what good it's doing me."

Uranium left its mark on whole communities throughout the Four Corners region.

In tiny Monticello, Utah, local newspaper editor Bill Boyle has a map stuck with more than 200 pins, one for each local resident who died or is dying of a radiation-related illness.

One pin represents a small, one-story house in the center of town.

There, former miner Joe Torres has turned his family's living room into a medical ward, with a bed propped where the sofa should be. Cancer has spread from his lungs to his liver, and a government IOU is doing him little good when he needs to buy more painkilling patches.

"I'm very shaken," he said. "I can't do a bit of work. And Social Security doesn't give me enough money to pay for my medicines. . . . I'd like to get at least part of my money to get by."

Combined, he and his wife, Vicenta, get just over \$1,000 a month from Social Security. The painkillers alone cost \$300 a month, and health insurance is coming due soon, she said.

Torres, 74, started working in the mines of 1951.

"They went in and worked and came back pretty well dusty from head to toe," Vicenta remembers. "But he had no idea that in time it would do something to them."

Shortly after talking with a reporter, Torres was hospitalized.

Since 1990, the radiation compensation program has relied on year-to-year allocations in the federal budget. Several lawmakers say it should be converted into an entitlement program so payments are guaranteed without a year-to-year budget fight. But they disagree on how to accomplish that.

Regardless of the answer, Rep. Mark Udall, D-Colo., says filling the trust fund's coffers should be a national priority.

"These people, as you know, have been jacked around for a lot of years," he said. "The statement we would make by providing them with this compensation they're due would be more than the money."

Meanwhile, surviving victims struggle to pay high medical bills and widows wait, not knowing when the government's promise will be kept.

In the northwest New Mexico town of Aztec, 56-year-old miner's widow Helen Story says she works two jobs a day shift and an overnight shift taking care of elderly hospice patients to get by.

She worked the same jobs while her husband, Jerald, fought the final months against cancer before he died last March at age 59.

Jerald Story started working in the uranium and coal mines as a teen-ager.

He never built up a pension because, like many miners, he bounced from one company to another over several decades. Health problems forced him to retire and go onto Social Security disability in the early 1980s.

"I was having to work as much as I could, which took time away from him," Helen Story said. "Some days you think you just can't take much more."

The couple first applied for RECA compensation three years ago. The government IOU came after Jerald Story's death, and his widow has become bitter.

"If they weren't going to stand good with the program, they never should have started it," Helen Story scoffs. "It's for sure that if we owed the government, they wouldn't wait this long on us."

PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT KIDS

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, last weekend, I joined members of the Michigan Partnership to Prevent Gun Violence and the Michigan Million Mom March, part of the coalition of People Who Care About Kids to circulate petitions calling for a citizens' referendum on Public Act 381, the "shall issue" law.

Passed by the Michigan Legislature in December 2000 and signed by the

Governor, the Act takes discretion away from local gun boards and requires that authorities "shall" or must issue concealed weapons licenses to any one 21 years or older without a criminal record, with limited exceptions.

People Who Care About Kids is collecting signatures to suspend implementation of the law, which would otherwise go into effect on July 1st of this year. If enough signatures are collected by the deadline, the issue will be put before voters in 2002. Petition organizers need only 151,356 valid signatures by the deadline, March 27th, but are seeking 225,000 signatures in total.

The "shall issue" law is opposed by many law enforcement groups, religious leaders, child advocates and community leaders. They oppose the law because they believe if people are able to carry handguns into restaurants, stores, shopping malls, movie theaters, courtrooms, parks or in cars, our communities will be less safe. I also oppose the "shall issue" law. Last weekend, I signed the petition to put the issue before the voters and I urge others to sign it as well.

ST. PATRICK'S DAY STATEMENT BY THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, today, the Friends of Ireland in Congress released its annual St. Patrick's Day Statement. The Friends of Ireland is a bipartisan group of Senators and Representatives opposed to violence and terrorism in Northern Ireland and dedicated to a United States policy that promotes a just, lasting and peaceful settlement of the conflict.

I believe this year's Friends of Ireland Statement will be of interest to all of our colleagues who are concerned about this issue, and I ask unanimous consent that it may be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

FRIENDS OF IRELAND STATEMENT—ST. PATRICK'S DAY 2001

The Friends of Ireland in the Congress join 44 million Irish Americans in celebrating the unique ties between America and the island of Ireland. We welcome the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, to the United States, and we send warm greetings to the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese.

We commend President Bush for expressing his willingness to remain involved in the pursuit of peace in Northern Ireland. The active engagement of President Clinton played an instrumental role in advancing the peace process, and it is vital that President Bush remain engaged.

The valuable work carried out by the new institutions set up under the Good Friday Agreement demonstrates the capacity of these institutions to contribute significantly to the welfare of the people of Northern Ireland and throughout Ireland. We call on all political representatives to develop the potential of the new arrangements by operating them to the full, under the rules, and in the spirit of the Agreement and thereby to consolidate the institutions for which the