

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 5, 2017

The Honorable Rob Bishop  
Chairman  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Paul Gosar  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Energy and  
Mineral Resources  
1522 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Chairman Gosar:

We are writing to ask you to take an important step towards fulfilling the promises made to our nation's coal miners by holding a hearing on H.R. 179, the *Miners Protection Act of 2017*.

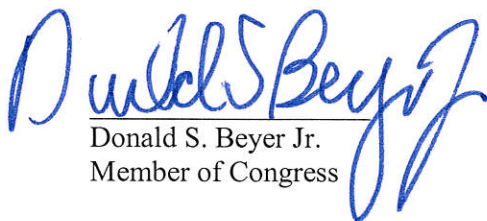
Due to recent coal company bankruptcies, health care benefits for retired coal miners had to be expanded via Section 167 of Public Law 114-254, the *Further Continuing and Security Assistance Appropriations Act, 2017*; however, that expansion only lasts until April 30, 2017. While additional short-term extensions may occur, the roughly 20,000 retired coal miners that depend on these benefits deserve the long-term certainty and security that H.R. 179 would provide. The bill would also help shore up the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) 1974 Pension Plan, which is depended on by nearly 90,000 retired miners nationwide, including roughly 7,500 in Virginia.<sup>1</sup>

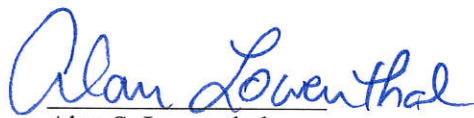
Coal miners and retirees are being hit particularly hard by the recent downturn in the coal industry, which is primarily due to competition with low-cost natural gas: in 2016, for the first time ever, natural gas produced a greater share of this nation's electricity than coal.<sup>2</sup> With natural gas prices expected to stay low for the next two years, and no new coal power plants being planned, coal demand is unlikely to significantly rebound in the near future. As a result, coal miners and their families will be increasingly at risk of losing the lifeline provided by the UMWA health and pension plans.

Congress needs to act to preserve health and pension benefits that have been promised for decades. H.R. 179, the *Miners Protection Act*, will ensure we keep our promises to Appalachia and to coal country.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

  
Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress

  
Alan S. Lowenthal  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Energy and  
Mineral Resources

  
A. Donald McEachin  
Member of Congress

<sup>1</sup> Testimony of Cecil E. Roberts, United Mine Workers of America, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance, March 1, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Energy Information Administration, *Electric Power Monthly*, Table 1.1. Net Generation by Energy Source: Total (All Sectors), 2006-December 2016, released February 24, 2017.