

in the United States where a minimum wage worker, paying 30 percent of his or her income for housing, could afford a one-bedroom apartment.

As for the government rent subsidies aimed at alleviating the hardship of low-income tenants, those too have shrunk.

The war on terror and the war in Iraq have pushed them off the agenda.

Today parts of Renter-World constitute a desperation sector of America. Poor people, crammed into too-small apartments, struggle to pay for food, rent, transportation, and medical care.

To paraphrase Linda Loman, lamenting the plight of her husband, Willy, in "Death of a Salesman": "Attention must be paid" to these renters.

The reason is pragmatic.

In the past, Renter-World has been a gateway to Owner-World. Low-income workers, renting for a few years, have saved up enough for the downpayment on a house, and, with scrimping, have kept up with mortgage payments. But today's renters cannot so easily make that leap. The Big Box shelver, married to the fast food waitress, may want the American dream. They may have left family thousands of miles away to seize the dream. But without some housing relief, they will never leave Renter-World.

And the promise of America, the dream for millions of Americans, is to leave Renter-World. That first mortgage—often the first mortgage for a family—constitutes step one in the economic mobility we value. High rents trap families, anchoring them on the bottom rung of the ladder that we want them to climb.

For the sake of the renters, and of the nation as a whole, Uncle Sam must pay attention to Renter-World.

TRIBUTE TO THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BURLINGTON BRISTOL BRIDGE

HON. JIM SAXTON

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Burlington Bristol Bridge as it turns 75 years old. The Burlington Bristol Bridge (1931–2006) is a vital transportation asset to the residents of South Jersey, connecting New Jersey to Pennsylvania.

The bridge replaced a ferry service which carried passengers across the Delaware River to Burlington, Bristol and the amusement park on Burlington Island. Bridge construction commenced on April 28, 1930, and was completed one year later, for a total cost of approximately \$1.5 million.

This landmark bridge stretches 2,301 feet from abutment to abutment, and is 20 feet in width, with one lane in each direction.

For many years after its construction, the bridge's lift span at 540 feet was the longest movable span ever built. It is a vertical "Lift" type of movable bridge, which raises regularly to allow large vessels to pass beneath.

Approximately 27,000 vehicles per day, or 9.9 million vehicles annually traverse it.

This man-made wonder has faithfully served the residents of South Jersey and Pennsylvania for three-quarters of a century, and will continue to do so for many more years. Its contributions to travelers and the citizens of South Jersey are hereby recognized.

INTRODUCTION OF THE "PROTECTING AMERICAN'S MINERS ACT"

HON. GEORGE MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Since the beginning of this year, we have witnessed numerous accidents in our Nation's underground mines. So far this year, 26 underground coal miners have died, more than the total for all of last year. Preliminary investigative reports and public hearings have made it clear that prompt action is necessary if we are to avoid a continued loss of life and disruptions to a vital American energy source.

For many months, I have been urging the Committee on Education and the Workforce to take action on this matter by marking up the legislation introduced by the West Virginia delegation. Sadly, that has not occurred. While the Senate is making progress on this matter in a bipartisan manner, the responsible leaders in this body have declined to treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves. The Administration, which helped create the problem by withdrawing regulatory initiatives that could have saved lives and moving enforcement resources into compliance assistance, is likewise lacking in purpose and direction in addressing this crisis.

Accordingly, today I rise to introduce new mine safety legislation, together with Congressman RAHALL of West Virginia, Congressman OWENS of New York, Congressman CHANDLER of Kentucky, Congressman HOLT of New Jersey, Congressman ARTUR DAVIS of Alabama, and Congressman MOLLOHAN of West Virginia. This legislation does not detract in any way from our continued pleas to this body to move forward with the West Virginia bill. It does, however, include refinements and new provisions based upon what we have learned since that bill was introduced. An identical bill is being introduced in the Senate by Senators KENNEDY, ROCKEFELLER, MURRAY and DURBIN, and we understand the refinements and new provisions reflected in this legislation are under active discussion in the responsible Senate committee. We hope that these new ideas will advance the discussion and lead to prompt action by this body. We will not let up on this, nor will we let complacency take root.

Following is a detailed section-by-section discussion of the new bill, entitled the "Protecting America's Miners Act." I encourage all of my colleagues to join me in support of this legislation, and in demanding action by this body before new tragedies strike.

SUMMARY OF PROTECTING AMERICA'S MINERAL ACT

(1) Short Title. "Protecting America's Miners Act".

(2) Sense of Congress. This legislation is necessary because of the failure by the current Administration to protect miners and properly prepare for the future.

(3) Definitions. Relevant definitions from the Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 are incorporated into this free-standing legislation.

(4) Improved escape and refuge requirements to help protect miners in the event of an emergency.

This section would establish improved safety standards to help underground coal

miners survive an underground emergency. Highlights include—

Requiring atmospheric detection and warning systems to alert miners to dangerous levels of harmful and explosive gases;

Requiring two-way messaging systems to communicate between miners and the surface once they are available; in the interim, one-way messaging systems and backup telephone lines would be required;

Requiring caches of self-rescuers for escape, and, until such time as the mine has established underground refuges, also requiring special caches to support prolonged stays underground;

Requiring underground refuges, meeting criteria based on past experience in the U.S. and abroad, to protect miners unable to escape from a mine; and

Requiring miners to be equipped with tracking devices to facilitate rescue.

The bill authorizes MSHA to revise these standards by regulation in order to improve them over time. This is the approach taken in 1977 when the current Mine Act was established. Similarly, MSHA is authorized to issue modifications of these standards for individual mines as with any safety standard under the requirements of existing law. Additional research on related topics is required by section 11 of the bill.

Because of the nature of these requirements, the bill would make any violation of them an "imminent danger" so that MSHA can act promptly to ensure mines are in compliance.

SECTION 5—FACILITATING THE PROMPT INITIATION OF RESCUE AND MINE RECOVERY EFFORTS

The bill would set up an Emergency Call Center to be sure MSHA is ready to receive information on emergencies—so callers don't find themselves going from answering machine to answering machine. The Call Center would have to be supplied by the Secretary with home and emergency numbers for key agency personnel, local emergency services, mine rescue teams, and others.

The bill would require that operators notify MSHA within 15 minutes of any emergency or serious incident. The bill ensures MSHA gets prompt notice of close calls, not just situations in which there are deaths or serious injuries.

The bill would separate mines into two categories for purposes of what mine rescue team requirements are applicable:

Those mines with less than 36 employees can contract out for mine rescue services to the nearest mines which maintain such teams, provided that: (1) the mine must include some of its own employees in the rescue team; (2) all rescue team members must be able to reach the mine within 1 hour; and (3) the operator must hold at least two rescue drills a year to ensure the team becomes familiar with the mine.

Those mines with 36 or more employees must have their own mine rescue teams (although they could contract for additional teams). These mines must also hold at least two rescue drills a year.

The bill would also require the Secretary to promptly initiate an expedited rule-making to revise existing mine rescue team requirements, and to consult broadly with existing mine rescue teams, other rescue organizations, local and State emergency authorities and others in this regard. The rules would cover training and qualifications for rescue team members, the equipment and technology used in rescue, the structure and organization of mine rescue teams, and other factors which have been identified by mine rescue team members at recent public hearings as posing problems during recent rescue efforts. Section 11 of the bill contains related research requirements.

SECTION 6—ENHANCING THE INVESTIGATION OF MINE ACCIDENTS

This section directs the Secretary of Labor to issue regulations on an expedited basis concerning the investigation of mine accidents. No such regulations currently exist, and so each investigation is ad hoc.

The Secretary is directed to consult widely in developing these regulations—including directly contacting family members who can be identified of any miner who perished in a mining accident of any type in the last 10 years. Miner families are authorized to be involved in all aspects of the investigation, and an advocate is to be appointed to facilitate their participation.

The regulations are to require public hearings be held in connection with any fatal accident or any accident which could have resulted in multiple fatalities.

This section would also authorize a majority of the families of any miners killed in an accident, or an authorized miner representative, to request that an additional investigation be conducted by the Chemical Safety Board or other appropriate federal agency. This would permit a more independent review of major accidents in which MSHA's own conduct may be an issue.

SECTION 7—ENHANCING OPERATOR AND OWNER INCENTIVES TO AVOID SERIOUS RISKS TO MINERS

The bill would direct the Secretary to revise the regulations which layout the process for citing operators who engage in a "pattern of violations." Such a penalty has never been assessed by MSHA despite the number of scoff-laws that have been identified. The changes required by the legislation would ensure that MSHA is required to make decisions on these situations in a timely way, and the Secretary is authorized to withdraw miners from the entire mine until a pattern of violations is corrected. The bill would also significantly increase the penalties for a "pattern of violations" up to \$1 million, and bar the Review Commission from reducing such penalties.

The bill also takes strong action to ensure operators pay their assessed penalties. The bill would forbid operators from contesting citations unless the assessed penalties are placed in escrow, and it would add criminal penalties for failure to pay.

The bill would also establish a minimum penalty of \$500 and a maximum penalty of \$250,000 for other violations. However, if the Secretary determines that the violation could have significantly and substantially contributed to a hazard, the bill would establish the minimum penalty as \$1000 and the maximum penalty as \$500,000. In addition, the bill establishes a penalty of between \$60,000 and \$100,000 for the failure to provide timely notification of accidents. The bill eliminates the requirement of current law that the size of the mine and the impact on an operator's ability to continue in business must be considered in assessing penalties.

SECTION 8—ENHANCING THE WILLINGNESS OF MINERS AND OTHERS TO REPORT SERIOUS PROBLEMS BEFORE ACCIDENTS OCCUR

This would establish a Miner Ombudsman in the Office of the Inspector General in DOL to take safety and health complaints from miners. The purpose of this provision is to help assure miners that their identities will not be compromised if they report mine safety and health problems to the Department.

SECTION 9—ENHANCING SPECIFIC PROTECTIONS FOR UNDERGROUND COAL MINES

This section would require the Secretary to expeditiously revise three existing standards to enhance the protection of underground coal miners.

(a) Conveyor belts and ventilation ("belt-air" rule). The belts that carry coal out of a

mine can ignite a fire or explosion due to friction. The legislation requires MSHA to expeditiously revise its regulations to adopt long-standing recommendations of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health that conveyor belts be designed to minimize flammability. Until the revised rules go into effect, the legislation suspends rules adopted in 2004 that generally permitted increased airflow over these conveyor belts. During this time, MSHA would, however, be permitted to return to its pre-2004 practice of permitting such additional airflow on a mine by mine basis following a public hearing on a request for such a modification.

(b) Seals. Seals are walls constructed in underground coal mines to enclose abandoned areas that they do not want to ventilate. Sealed areas can become highly explosive due to methane gas, and hence the seals have to meet prescribed standards. The bill would require MSHA to expeditiously adopt more protective standards. In addition to requiring seals to withstand more pressure than under the current rules, the Secretary is directed to consider whether it should inspect all seals during construction to be sure they are built according to plan. In addition to requiring an improved standard, the bill would require the Secretary to promptly conduct a special inspection of all current seals in underground coal mines composed of non-traditional materials to ensure they are properly constructed.

(c) Respirable (coal) dust. Black lung continues to be diagnosed among younger coal miners. To eliminate this disease forever, the bill requires the Secretary to expeditiously revise the current standard to reduce the allowable level of respirable dust to that recommended by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Consistent with other findings by NIOSH, the bill would eliminate the current requirement that several samples be averaged before a citation can be issued, and requires compliance samples to be taken by the Secretary or by placing personal dust monitors on at least 3 miners per shift.

SECTION 10—TRANSITION TO A NEW GENERATION OF INSPECTORS

It takes 18 months to train a new inspector; and government personnel ceilings and retirement rules mean there may be a critical gap in mine safety and health inspectors over the next few years even if there is money appropriated in sufficient quantities to take on new staff. The bill provides that for a 5-year period, MSHA inspector staffing is exempted from personnel ceilings (only funding governs) and from certain pension reductions that make it difficult to use retired inspectors as necessary to fill the gap.

An additional problem for MSHA is to simultaneously provide both enforcement and compliance assistance, particularly for small mine operators. The bill would provide that for a 5-year period, government resources be used exclusively for enforcement, while compliance assistance to the industry be funded exclusively through a user fee. The user fee would be \$100 for every penalty assessed on any mine operator. This money would be used exclusively to provide the industry with technical support and advice, and priority would be given to requests for small mines (those with less than 20 miners).

Because of the unusual nature of these provisions, special monitoring by the Congress is appropriate, and an annual report would be required each of the five years that these requirements would be in effect.

SECTION 11—TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The legislation requires that in implementing its research activities in the next five years, the National Institute for Occupa-

tional Safety and Health give due consideration to new technologies, and existing technologies that could be adopted for use in underground mines, which could facilitate the survival of miners in an emergency.

The bill notes that such technologies include, but are not limited to:

- Longer lasting self-rescuers;
- Two-way communication devices;
- Improved battery capacity and specifications to handle multiple devices;
- Improved technology to determine underground conditions during an emergency situation; and
- Improved technology for mine rescue crews.

RECOGNIZING PAUL REDMAN

HON. PATRICK J. TIBERI

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

Mr. TIBERI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and pay tribute to Paul Redman, an individual who has contributed his time and effort to the central Ohio community for over a decade. Paul's talent has made the Franklin Park Conservatory one of the signature cultural sites in Columbus.

The Franklin Park Conservatory provides an important service to Ohioans. It provides not only a showcase for the beauty of nature but serves as a vital educational source on botanical and ecological matters. The extensive facilities allow thousands of individuals throughout the region to participate in the study and appreciation of nature and various nature-based art.

Paul's professionalism has drawn the premier artists of our day to display their work at the conservatory. His tireless efforts to provide the best exhibits and value for the community have served to enhance central Ohio's reputation for quality people and superior work. His contributions to the civic and cultural landscape of central Ohio will continue to impact generations to come. His exemplary leadership and service have added to central Ohio's growing fame as one of the most vibrant areas in America.

I am pleased to recognize Paul's commitment to central Ohio and his outstanding tenure as Executive Director of the Franklin Park Conservatory. I'm proud to echo the sentiments expressed by so many prestigious voices across the country, and I wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

TRIBUTE TO CHRISTINE BURROUGHS

HON. ZOE LOFGREN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise in gratitude to recognize the continued extraordinary achievements, community leadership and contributions of Christine Burroughs, Director of InnVision the Way Home. InnVision is a leading provider of services for homeless and low-income individuals and families in Santa Clara County.

Ms. Burroughs has successfully led InnVision the Way Home since 1991. During