

leadership of Walter Hussman, his family, and David Bailey, the managing editor. This time, the paper is transforming for the digital era, moving from paper to screen, and it is even giving away free iPads to subscribers to ease the transition. So if you are not already a subscriber, consider supporting our local journalism in Arkansas. It has a bright future ahead.

Today, unfortunately, many venerable newspaper have fallen on hard times. Too many journalists can't be bothered to get the story right. Too many local communities are losing parts of their identity, which is all the more reason to celebrate newspapers like the Democrat-Gazette, which do get the story right and have preserved their distinctive character throughout the years.

Some things may change. The Democrat-Gazette of the future may be heralded by the bright glow of the screen rather than the rustle of the news page. But other, more important things stay the same, such as integrity, impartiality, and credibility. The Democrat-Gazette holds its reporters to the highest standards of accuracy and ethics.

Walter Hussman publishes these high standards that won the Gazette two Pulitzer Prizes every day on page 2 of the newspaper in its statement of core values. That statement reads:

Credibility is the greatest asset of any news medium and impartiality is the greatest source of credibility.

The Democrat-Gazette practices what it preaches, and for that reason, it continues to succeed 200 years on.

There is also its Arkansas focus. As ever, the Democrat-Gazette earnestly pursues stories in Arkansas for the benefit of Arkansans. It is this proud local focus which has made the Democrat-Gazette a beloved institution in Arkansas and which will sustain it in the years ahead. Finally, the pioneer spirit—from the Arkansas Territory to the frontiers of digital journalism, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette will travel confidently into the future.

Today, I join Senator BOOZMAN in congratulating the Hussman family, the Democrat-Gazette, and all of their many hard-working professionals and journalists.

I yield the floor to my colleague, the senior Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam President, it is a pleasure to be with my friend and colleague from Arkansas to talk about a tremendous State institution, something that is truly a true Arkansas institution, and we want to pay tribute to it and the men and women who made it great in the past and will continue to make it great into the future.

Newspapers have played a vital role in our country's history of public discourse, increasing our knowledge and awareness about what takes place all around us. The stories they print keep us informed, while building a sense of community and regional identity. Newspapers drive political debates and set the agenda, helping us make sense of the issues impacting our world.

As one of the oldest continuously published newspapers west of the Mississippi, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette has been a resource of information that has kept readers connected to community, the State, and our Nation for 200 years.

In 1819, William E. Woodruff published the first edition of the Arkansas Gazette, the Arkansas Territory's first newspaper. There was no shortage of news to print in those days. During its early years, the publication encouraged settlement to the region, shared news of national importance, and promoted statehood.

For generations, this publication has been a primary source of reliable and comprehensive news that has shaped the way Arkansans view the world. It has constantly challenged the status quo and examined the decisions of elected leaders, while pursuing transparency and accountability.

The work the Gazette produced often resulted in positive change in the Natural State. In 1957, the newspaper opposed Governor Orval Faubus's decision to prevent integration of Little Rock Central High School. For its reporting on the struggles of integration, the Gazette earned two Pulitzer Prizes, one for meritorious public service and the other awarded to its executive editor, Harry Ashmore, for editorial writing, marking the first time a newspaper won two Pulitzer Prizes in the same year.

The newspaper and its spirited competitor, the Arkansas Democrat, contended for readers and advertisers for decades. In 1991, the Gazette was sold to the owners of the Arkansas Democrat, who then launched the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, which is the only statewide newspaper Arkansans read today.

The importance of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette in today's media landscape cannot be overstated. In some cases, it is the sole source of news for many small towns in Arkansas, as local newspapers continue to cease operations, especially those serving rural areas.

Under the leadership of Walter Hussman, Jr., the Democrat-Gazette is navigating the challenging industry landscape and creating opportunities to keep readers informed by keeping costs manageable. Hussman and his team are rethinking how and what news they deliver to readers, as well as how subscribers can and like to consume it.

To cut printing and transportation costs and combat declining advertisement revenue, the paper is now using iPads to maintain subscribers and continue providing this valuable, not-easily-replaced service to the community.

In an interview earlier this year about efforts at the Democrat-Gazette, Hussman noted his view that the print model is not sustainable, but he voiced his commitment to finding a solution that will fill the void because, as he says, society and our democracy will be impeded if we don't have newspapers.

It is a simple truth. Throughout periods of change, Hussman and the newspaper he owns continue to believe in the critical role that news gathering and reporting play in informing the public.

Every day, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette and the other publications owned by the Hussman family publish a statement of core values that include "objectivity, impartiality, integrity and truth-seeking." This clear, sensible mantra consistently helps guide the work done by the reporters and editors in the paper's newsrooms.

Journalism is a pillar of our democracy. Our Founders understood the importance of a free press and included protections in the First Amendment that safeguard and ensure the ability of reporters and the publications they write for to hold the powerful to account.

Earlier this year, I was proud to support the World Press Freedom Day resolution and recognize the sacrifices journalists around the world make in their effort to report the truth.

We must continue to promote a free and open press in the United States and around the globe. In today's climate, we all share responsibility for acknowledging the value and the necessity of press freedom while at the same time not shrinking away from appropriate scrutiny and fair criticism. The health and well-being of our society and civic life depends on striking the right balance in this regard.

For 200 years, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette has kept individuals informed about moments and events of significance in Arkansas, our country, and the world. I congratulate the newspaper's leaders and staff for pursuing facts and accountability, as they have created and sustained the publication as a responsible and reliable source of information.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

BIPARTISAN AMERICAN MINERS ACT

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, I want to first say thank you to my colleagues, Senate Majority Leader MITCH MCCONNELL and Senators CAPITO, PORTMAN, JONES, KAINE, DUCKWORTH, BROWN, CASEY, DURBIN, WARNER, SINEMA, VAN HOLLEN, and REED, who have cosponsored this legislation with me, for standing with me to protect coal miners' pensions and healthcare, and specifically Senator CAPITO, who will be joining me here on the floor today.

Yesterday marked the 51st anniversary of the Farmington No. 9 disaster, where 78 coal miners lost their lives in the Consolidation Coal Company's No. 9 mine in Farmington, WV, which is my hometown. I lost my uncle John Gouzd in that mine explosion, I lost my neighbor John Sopuch, and I lost several of my classmates in that tragedy that rocked my hometown. It seems like only yesterday.

I have always said that one life lost while on the job is one too many. It

shouldn't happen. This tragedy shows the risk our coal miners take every day to provide our country with the energy we need, which is why I am here today.

When coal companies go bankrupt, coal miners' benefits are at the bottom of the priority list, which is how we have ended up in this situation today, and that is unacceptable. It should be unacceptable to all of us.

The person who earns the wage should be on the front end of the line when a bankruptcy happens, and whatever happens, they are taken care of first. Time is running out for our coal miners. We need it fixed now—not in a few weeks, not in 2020, but now. Year after year, our coal miners risk their lives to bring America the energy needed to become the world leader that we are today. Our coal miners made a commitment to our country, and now, it is our turn to uphold the commitment we made to them in 1946 by securing their hard-earned pensions in healthcare.

Let me tell you about the coal that we have in our country and has been mined by our hard-working coal miners since the beginning of the 20th century. That coal basically has fueled every war that we have been in, helped us win every war, helped propel us to the industrial might that we are today, built our factories. It has done everything for us, and all we are doing now is trying to make sure that the people that sacrificed all these years are taken care of.

We have 1,000 coal miners who will lose their healthcare coverage on December 31 of this year, a little over a month from now. We also have 12,000 more coal miners who will lose their healthcare in March of next year, and that is only 4 months away. This is an issue that must be dealt with immediately, and time is running out. If you are one of those 1,000 coal miners and one of your family members is depending on their healthcare—probably life-supporting healthcare—and they are thinking they are going to lose it at the end of this month, it is unconscionable for us to walk out of here and not get this piece of legislation down. With it being so bipartisan—having the majority leader from Kentucky representing the coal miners of Kentucky—this is something that needs to be done immediately, and I know that we can.

But if we don't pass this legislation to protect our miners, the UMWA pension fund will be insolvent by this time next year. With the largest privately owned coal company, Murray Energy, filing for bankruptcy 2 weeks ago, the timeline for the UMWA pension fund moved up 2 years. It accelerated a basically exacerbating position that we were in to begin with. Murray Energy, to date, has contributed over 97 percent of the money going into the UMWA pension fund annually because of the size of their company, which is why its bankruptcy has accelerated the situation we are in today with the pension fund insolvency.

Once the UMWA pension fund would become insolvent if we don't do something, this crisis will snowball and impact every other multi-employer pension fund in America. They will all start tumbling, along with the PBGC, which is a federally funded pension guarantee. That is why it is essential that we protect our coal miners' pensions now—not next year or the year after that—which is why my colleagues and I introduced the Bipartisan American Miners Act.

The Bipartisan American Miners Act would amend the current Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 to transfer funds in excess of the amounts needed to be meet existing obligations under the Abandoned Mine Land fund to the 1974 Pension Plan to prevent its looming insolvency. It also raises the cap on these funds from \$490 million to \$750 million to ensure that there is sufficient funding for those pension funds.

It also guarantees lifetime healthcare for the 13,000 individuals, including the 1,000 scheduled to lose their healthcare on December 31 of this year, by amending the Coal Act to include 2018 and 2019 bankruptcies in the miners' healthcare fix that passed in 2017. The funding for coal miners' pensions is already there. It just needs to be reallocated. These actions will secure the pensions of 92,000 coal miners and their families and protect healthcare benefits for 13,000 miners. That is our goal, and I am proud to be here fighting for these miners today because they surely have fought for me and given me the great country that I live in today.

These miners took home less pay every day from their paycheck with the expectations that they will be able to retire and provide for their families after working for decades for our country. They have paid what they are trying to receive. It is not something they are asking for, a handout. They are not asking for a Government handout or taxpayer handout. They are just wanting the money that they invested and paid into all of these years. It is money they did not take out.

Workers expect the wages they have contributed to be there when they retire, as they were promised. If we pass the Bipartisan American Miners Act as an amendment to the continuing resolution, we will protect coal miners' pensions and healthcare now before it is too late. The Bipartisan American Miners Act is ready to be voted on and has the support from both sides of the aisles. I just read off a list of our sponsors.

The Bipartisan American Miners Act is basically a piece of legislation that needs to be done immediately. If we don't pass it now, 1,000 miners, as I said before, will lose their healthcare on December 31. Healthcare benefits will be terminated, as we talked about, and then by early September 2020, the pension benefits of 82,000 current pensioners and 10,000 future pensioners

could be drastically reduced because of the plan's insolvency.

I want to remind you also that the average pension of a coal miner is less than \$600 a month. Most of these are widows. Their husbands have passed on, and they are living on this as a subsistence basically for their income. It would be tremendously harmful for them not to be able to receive this.

I believe that we can and will pass this legislation before it is too late for these miners as an amendment to the CR. That is all we are asking for. It must be done before and no later than December 20. I am trying to get this on now so that we can move forward.

Can you imagine being one of the 1,000 coal miners, maybe having one of your loved ones—your wife or one of your children—who has a serious illness and needs attention and knowing they are not going to be able to get attention basically to any healthcare after December 31, so put yourself in their shoes.

These are the families that deserve the peace of mind knowing that their pensions are going to be paid and their paycheck—that they did not take the money home—is going to be secure. We can give them peace of mind today. I look forward to passing this legislation with all of my colleagues. It is bipartisan. This is the first time we have had something of this magnitude being done in a bipartisan way. The good Lord knows we need more bipartisan efforts to work for the people.

If we are going to stand for the working men and women that made America, what is our purpose of being here, and who do we stand for? So I am asking all of you, please, with the urgency that is needed, please take up this piece of legislation. Please take up this amendment to the CR, and let's take care of the people that helped make America as great as we are today, the coal miners of the United Mine Workers of America.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). The Senator from West Virginia.

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. President, I am really pleased to be here with my fellow West Virginia Senator, Mr. MANCHIN. We have joined each other on this topic before, but he has been a real champion for our miners, and I am really grateful to him and others who have participated, but I think we have got to talk about this every day and make sure that we underscore the urgent need to pass the Bipartisan American Miners Act. I appreciate Senator MANCHIN and certainly appreciate Leader MCCONNELL who has been a

champion for our miners as well—Senator Portland as well—who have made this retirement security a top priority.

Back in 2017, time was running out on the healthcare benefits for 12,000 retired miners. I remember it well, particularly following the Patriot Coal bankruptcy. We came together as a bipartisan group to pass legislation with the House that protected healthcare for those men and women. While we are in a similar situation today, which we knew we were going to be here, the Senate needs to act soon to save the healthcare of 13,000 retired miners and protect the pension benefits of 92,000 people.

Time is of the essence here because roughly 1,000 retirees from Westmoreland and Mission Coal will lose their healthcare at the end of the year if we do not act; 12,000 more could lose their healthcare by next spring, and the pension benefits are at risk in 2020. This is a critical, critical issue for my State and many others.

I am going to take a brief moment to explain how this legislation works, and it is a bit complicated. In 2006, when we passed the last reauthorization of the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program, we had a capped permanent direct appropriation that was created for transfer of payments. That permanent direct appropriation, along with the interest on the AML—the Abandoned Mine Land—trust fund has been used to fund AML payments to certified States and to provide healthcare for our miners. What do we do to certify States? The whole point of the AML is to do reclamation and repair of previously mined lands all throughout our country.

That permanent direct appropriation has been used for the payments for the certified States and also to provide healthcare to our orphaned miners. Well, for those who are not from a coal company, what is an orphaned miner? An orphaned miner is someone who earned a vested right to retiree healthcare benefits through years of hard work but worked for a company that either no longer exists or is no longer financially solvent.

The Bipartisan American Miners Act makes use of the same appropriation that was created in 2006 to cover the healthcare for retirees whose healthcare would be lost due to the bankruptcies in 2018, 2019. The bill would provide resources to guarantee the long-term solvency of the mine workers' pension fund. This is critical. Previous versions of this bill that many of us supported were able to accomplish this goal of protecting those retirement beneficiaries without lifting the cap on the direct appropriation that was set in 2006.

Because Congress has delayed action for so long, our current legislation must lift the cap in order to provide healthcare and pension benefits for our miners. Protecting these benefits is a top priority for me because it impacts so many mining families and commu-

nities in West Virginia. Just last weekend, I talked to three miners directly impacted, just kind of randomly ran into them in different areas of our State.

But I think it is important to understand that this bill does not place other policy items in jeopardy. That is a misconception. Passing this bill does not disturb the principal balance of the AML trust fund. That means we are not jeopardizing funds that are used to clean up abandoned mine sites, and passing this bill will not cut funding for other transfer payments that are authorized by the law.

What the bill will do is protect retirement benefits for tens of thousands of retired miners and their families—benefits that have been worked for, benefits that have been earned through the hard work in our mines; 25,451 West Virginians received benefits from the pension fund during 2018. They were joined by more than 11,000 Pennsylvanians, 8,500 Kentuckians, and thousands more from Illinois, Virginia, Alabama, and Ohio. The pension benefits of all the men and women are at risk if Congress fails to act.

The average benefit—listen to this—the average benefit for our miners is \$590 a month, so these are not lavish benefits, but they are critical to our retirees. One retired miner from Logan, WV, who worked for 36 years in the mines, wrote me and said, “Please keep fighting to save our pension. I receive \$303.34 monthly. We need this badly to help us pay for our food, our medicine and other bills.”

A miner from Richwood, WV, who mined coal for 17 years, wrote, “My monthly check is \$192. It is not a lot of money, but it means a lot to my ability to make ends meet.”

I would add to both of these, these men, these gentlemen, they worked for these pensions. They paid into the pensions. They should receive them. Pension benefits from the mine workers plan went to individuals in all 55 West Virginian counties, so this is truly an issue that impacts my entire State. But in the areas that have the largest number of pensioners, which is Raleigh, Logan, Wyoming, Marion, and Boone Counties, cuts to the pension and healthcare benefits of our retired families would have significant impacts on our entire community.

If these retirees face severe reductions in their pensions, it means less money spent at the local businesses, less money at a local restaurant, and it would cause further economic harm to the areas that cannot afford another blow.

So I ask my colleagues to join me, Senator MANCHIN, Leader McCONNELL, Senator PORTMAN, and many others, by supporting the Bipartisan American Miners Act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the cloture vote on

the Brouillette nomination occur at 1:30 p.m. today.

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

AMENDMENT NO. 1250

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I rise to present an amendment to this bill. My amendment is simple, and it reflects the kind of commonsense budgeting we ought to be doing in Washington. Today I offer the penny plan for infrastructure. This plan cuts one penny, 1 percent of all spending, and puts that money in a fund for infrastructure.

My amendment would put about \$12 billion per year into a fund to fix our roads and bridges. Every agency would still get 99 percent of the spending they got the previous year. Sure, they would need to trim some fat, but they would still be fine. A lot of businesses and organizations will tell you they have to cut much greater than 1 percent a year.

I visited a business recently that in the downturn of 2008–2009 had to cut 30 percent of their expenditures. Business men and women in America are used to having to cut expenditures; government never does.

Whether it is our highways or our bridges or our waterways, our infrastructure in America is falling behind. Everyone knows it, but like so many things, Washington can't figure out how to fix it, how to find the money to fix it.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle talk about trillion-dollar infrastructure plans but offer no way to pay for it. My plan is much more modest, doesn't increase taxes, and doesn't increase our debt. The penny plan for infrastructure pays for it with money we have already allocated.

To be clear, we do have the money. Washington just spends it in inappropriate ways. Washington spends, for example, \$233 million on a single highway in Afghanistan. We have money to pave roads in Afghanistan, but they will not vote to spend the money here to pave roads.

The people in Afghanistan got \$233 million for a road, but they couldn't even maintain it, so we gave them another \$22 million to maintain the road.

We spent \$326 million to pave 2,000 kilometers of dirt roads in Afghanistan. We have enough money to spend over \$300 million to pave dirt roads in Afghanistan, but we can't come up with \$1 billion to help our infrastructure here. They were supposed to pave 2,000 kilometers; it turned out they only paved 159 kilometers. They paved less than 10 percent of what they actually promised to do with the money. What is that equal to—\$2.7 million per mile.

It is outrageous, and it goes on year after year after year. I think it is time we try a new way. Just in Afghanistan, we have spent more than the Marshall Plan did to rebuild Europe after the devastation of World War II, and we are still there, spending good money after bad. So when people come up here and