

## Special Legislative Issue

### The Emergency Health Benefits Protection Act

**I**n the November 2000 Newsletter, we reported that Massachusetts Representative John Tierney had introduced legislation that would stop companies from reducing or eliminating a retiree's health benefits after the person had retired. (See inset for details.) That legislation has since been re-introduced and is now known as H.R. 1322. The bill amends the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), which protects our pension benefits.

Many of you have been doing your job and writing to your Congressional Representative about this important bill. Thank you for your efforts on behalf of retirees all across America. Letters have been pouring into Congress and the act will soon have 100 or more co-sponsors - all Democrats.

Some Republicans have expressed interest in it; however, not one single Republican has signed on to be a co-sponsor.

We need more of you to contact your Congressional Representative immediately. E-mail, call and write - don't hold back. Without bi-partisan co-sponsorship, the bill will be doomed from the start. We want all members of

Congress contacted, but we want a concerted effort made to attract Republicans.

The following are Republicans that have shown interest and, given a push from you, might sign on:

Constance Morella (MD), Marge Roukema (NJ), Jim Nussle (IA), Bill Young (FL), John Boehner (OH), Sherwood Boehlert (NY), Charlie Norwood (GA), Jim Greenwood (PA), Mary Bono (CA), Rob Simmons (CT).

Remember to remind your Republican Congressional members that President Bush

has declared Health Care for Seniors a priority. This is a great opportunity to support his platform and do the right thing for seniors.

#### Details from the November 2000 Newsletter

Legislation would:

- (a) prohibit employers from canceling or reducing a retiree's health benefits after a person has retired,
- (b) except in cases of substantial business hardship, require employers to restore health benefits they previously took away as a result of post-retirement actions, and
- (c) establish a federal retiree health loan guarantee authority to enable employers to obtain financial assistance for purposes of restoring retiree health benefits.

## You Can Do Your Part Now

All U.S. residents are served by three people in Washington: two Senators and one member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Write a letter to your state representative, urging him/her to support HR1322.

There are a couple of ways to find the name and local address of your elected official. You can call the Capital Building at 202-224-3121 or you can find this information on the internet by going to *www.belltelretirees.org* and clicking on Legislative Action Center.

If you know your representative's name and want to mail your letter to Washington, D.C., address it to the U.S. Representative (name), U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20510.

Congress works for you. Write, call or send an e-mail.

### Letters are the most effective

Type or hand-write your letter in ink. If you type your letter, you may want to personalize it with a hand written comment.

Use your own letterhead, stationery, or plain paper for your letter.

Include your return address on both the letter and the envelope (in case they get separated) so that you can receive a written response. If you have one, put in your e-mail address.

Address members as follows:

*The Honorable* (Representative's name),  
*House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.*  
*20515, Dear Representative* (last name):

Keep your message clear and brief. State your position up front. Letters should be no longer than one to two pages.

Personalize your letter. (For example, say what you do for a living, the number of people in your family of household, how long you have lived in your town or state, or how long you worked for the company.)

Send a follow-up letter. You can write more than once on the same topic. Let your representatives know whether or not you agree with their position.

### For Phone Calls

Dial the congressional switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask to be connected to the appropriate office. Or, check your local phone directory (White Pages) for the in-state number of your Washington Representative's district office.

### To Send E-mail

Go to *www.house.gov/writerep*. Virtually all Congressional offices have e-mail capability.

### Maximize Your Effort

Make your elected officials accountable to you. Ask for a written response stating their position and voting plans.

Write more than once.

Urge others to contact their Representatives. This is important to every retiree and to everyone planning retirement.

## Example Letters

The following are example model letters. If you use one, you should alter it with your personal touch. Do not send a sample as is. It will be discounted as a form letter.

Dear Representative \_\_\_\_\_:

*I am writing to request that you support the H.R. 1322, the Emergency Retiree Health Benefits Protection Act of 2001, which was sponsored by Representative John F. Tierney (D. Mass.).*

*This bill is very important to me and my spouse because it would prevent my former employer from cutting off or cutting back my retiree health benefits. I made all my retirement plans and medical arrangements on the basis of what my employer had promised to provide me when I retired.*

*This bill is an absolute priority for retirees living on fixed incomes, especially those who are ill and rely on their employer's health insurance to pull them through. It is unconscionable for the law to permit employers to put retirees in harm's way by stopping or reducing health insurance coverage after a person has retired.*

*President Bush made health care for seniors a priority of his administration. Support of this bill is not only consistent with the President's platform; it is the right thing to do!*

*Please let me know that you have given this bill your complete support. I am counting on you.*

*Thank you very much for your prompt attention to this matter.*

*Sincerely,*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

*I am a retiree from Johns Manville Corporation and I live in your district.*

*I belong to the Johns Manville Retirees Association, which has about 2000 paid up members. Our organization is linked to the National Retiree Legislative Network covering retirees from many large corporations and representing several million pensioners.*

*I am concerned about the "Emergency Retiree Health Benefits Protection Act of 2001, H.R. 1322," introduced earlier this year by Congressman Tierney of Massachusetts.*

*All erosion of retirees' pension and health benefits through corporate lobbying efforts will ultimately lead to the state and federal governments having to take up the slack. This will cost the taxpayers more money.*

*My fellow retirees and I will appreciate any effort on your part and your colleagues to help this bill get through congress. Please let me know if I can count on your support.*

*Sincerely,*