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Retirees Storm Capitol Hill During Older Americans Month to Fight for their Healthcare

Retirees from all across the country traveled to Washington, D.C., on May 10th for a rally sponsored by ProtectSeniors.Org, in part to highlight Older Americans Month, and to meet with key Members of Congress to discuss retiree healthcare reform.

Retirees met with leaders from both parties to stress the urgency of passing the Earned Retiree Healthcare Benefits Protection Act of 2011, (H.R. 1322), introduced by Rep. John Tierney (D-MA) and Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC), which is bipartisan legislation that would prohibit the cancellation of retiree health benefits that were earned and paid for by retirees during their working years.

“The pensions and post-retirement healthcare benefits our retirees receive aren’t entitlements or gifts from former employers. They were earned in exchange for taking less in salary, vacation time, and working longer hours during their working years,” said Paul Miller, Executive Director of ProtectSeniors.Org. “Congress needs to protect America’s retirees from becoming victims of the country’s economic ills and from corporations slashing earned healthcare benefits.”

After arriving at the Capitol, the retiree healthcare protection rally was kicked off by speeches from Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC), Rachel Evans with Rep. John Tierney, and Pension Rights Center Executive Vice President and policy director Karen Friedman. Rep. Jones, an original cosponsor of H.R. 1322, implored retirees to use the face-to-face meetings to educate their Members of Congress on the concerns about the threats to retiree healthcare security.

The Congressman told retirees that passing H.R.1322 is a matter of fairness and corporations’ failure to keep the promises to their former employees is purely greed. “Promises made, should be promises kept... If this wasn’t a fairness issue, I do not believe you would be here today,” he said.

Rep. Jones urged retirees to push their Members of Congress to cosponsor H.R. 1322 “because it is a numbers game.” He said, “any time you get 1 -20 people to travel to see you, it makes an impression.”

Karen Friedman of the Pension Rights Center praised the retirees on their initiative to fight for their healthcare. She spoke of how change in legislation happens when people get involved. “I really applaud ProtectSeniors.Org, you make the difference... It is not an overstatement to say every law that has been passed on pension issues is because of people like you coming to the Hill,” said Friedman.

Retirees spent the afternoon walking the halls of Congress meeting with their elected officials. Wearing distinguishing blue t-shirts, this large group of retirees came here with a mission and left leaving its mark on every member office they visited.

“Today was an absolute success! This event highlights just how important retirees are and just how committed they can be when the cause is right. Come 2012 you will see this same commitment at the ballot box should Congress not heed their call and pass H.R. 1322 into law,” added Miller.

About ProtectSeniors.Org: ProtectSeniors.Org represents 14.3 million retirees from 392 different companies, 45 labor union locals, 98 municipal, state and federal retiree groups and 16 associations.