

UMWA Returns to St. Louis as federal legislation begins to move in Washington to provide help for retirees, widows

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For immediate release:

[ST. LOUIS] More than 1,000 United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) members from six states were joined today by hundreds of supporters from labor and community organizations in the St. Louis area in a rally in front of the Thomas Eagleton Federal Building, which houses the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Missouri.

Miners and supporters then marched to Peabody Energy headquarters where ten of them were arrested in a non-violent action. Workers are protesting a scheme by Peabody, which deliberately spun off a new company – Patriot Coal – with insufficient assets to meet the company’s health care obligations to retired miner workers. Arch Coal did much the same thing when it took part in the creation of Magnum Coal in 2005. Patriot bought Magnum in 2008.

Today’s rally is part of an all-fronts campaign by the UMWA, which includes legal action; federal legislation to be introduced by Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WVA); broadcast, print, outdoor and online advertising; and continued protests in St. Louis and other cities.

“We are here to remind Peabody Energy, Arch Coal and Patriot Coal that we are never going to quit in our fight for justice,” UMWA International Secretary-Treasurer Dan Kane said. “We are going to hold them accountable for their scheme to rid themselves of obligations to retirees and widows, and we’ll be here for as long as it takes.”

Kane noted that while union members were rallying outside the courthouse, Patriot lawyers were inside, asking the bankruptcy court to approve a proposal to strip health care benefits from retired managers and foremen, who are not eligible for union membership. “Those are the same lawyers who will be in that courthouse before long wanting to strip your health care,” Kane said. “But we’ll be fighting them every step of the way.”

Miners were joined by Rev. Dr. Martin Rafanan, former senior pastor at Resurrection Lutheran Church in St. Louis and currently co-chair of the Workers Rights Board of St. Louis Jobs with Justice.

“In this Lenten season, Christians are focused on how we can live a life of service and commitment, to lift one another up and strengthen our communities,” said Rev. Rafanan, who was among those arrested for sitting down in front of Peabody’s St. Louis headquarters. “It’s exactly the right time to join with people of all faiths to challenge the corporate executives at Peabody, Arch and Patriot. They are using financial and legal maneuvers to deny retired miners the health care they worked years to earn, and so richly deserve.” The campaign to expose the financial maneuvers by Peabody and Arch which attempt to cheat retired miners out of health care they worked years to earn has gained increasing national attention in recent weeks.

- Sen. Jay Rockefeller, (D-WVA) announced last week that he will propose legislation to aid retired miners and their survivors. The proposed bill, The Coalfield Accountability and Retired Employee Act, would aid

miners retired from Peabody, Arch and other coal companies by transferring unclaimed from the Abandoned Mine Land fund to the UMWA 1974 Pension Plan.

- A forthcoming study by Dr. Bruce Rader, a professor of finance at Temple University, concludes that Patriot Coal was “create to fail in the long run.”

- A recent story in *The New Republic* details efforts by Peabody and Arch to escape from their health care obligations. The article quotes West Virginia physician Michael Schroering, who treats many active and retired mine workers:

“Just from an ethical standpoint, I find it disgusting that a corporation would be trying to what Peabody is trying to do by separating out the older miners and putting [them] in a company they knew would fail, just so they could get out from paying.”

A livestream of today’s protest is archived at <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/mineworkers>. Further information about the UMWA campaign is available at FairnessatPatriot.org, and on Facebook at “Fairness at Patriot.”