

The original documents are located in Box 117, folder “Black Lung” of the Ron Nessen Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

Copyright Notice

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Ron Nessen donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

BLACK LUNG

- Q. The House of Representatives this week passed a measure to increase black lung benefits to miners and their families. Will you support this measure?
- A. I think it is important to note that under existing law about $\frac{1}{2}$ million beneficiaries are already receiving about \$1 billion a year from the Federal government in the way of black lung benefits. So we are already making a substantial contribution to those miners who were disabled by black lung and to the families of miners who have died and who had black lung.

The problem with the legislation which was recently passed by the House is that it would provide assistance to miners even where there is no proof of disability. It would create an irrebutable presumption that if you work a certain number of years you are entitled to black lung benefits.

It is important to provide assistance to those who are disabled by black lung. But is it fair to other working men and women to ask them to support increased payments without requiring evidence of black lung disease?

Background

The Black Lung bill passed the House by a vote of 210-183 on March 2. The bill was subsequently referred to the Labor and Public Welfare Committee in the Senate.

In addition to the notion of the irrebutable presumption of disability after 30 years (25 years in an anthracite mine) the bill would establish a new, permanent Federal role in compensation through a trust fund in the Treasury, although there would be no direct Federal expenditure to support this trust fund.

The bill in reality creates a pension, not a disability benefit.

Page 2

The bill would also require the Social Security Administration to re-open 180,000 previously adjudicated claims.

Estimates vary, but the cost of the bill to the Federal government over the five years of Federal payments would be at least \$800 million.

DHL/3/4/76

March 2, 1976

SUBJECT:

BLACK LUNG BILL

Today H.R. 10760, the Black Lung Benefits Reform Act of 1975, comes before the House of Representatives for a vote. It is expected to pass easily, and there is some question as to whether we would have enough support to sustain a veto.

How does the President feel about the Black Lung Legislation before the House?

GUIDANCE: While the aim of the legislation--to assist miners who have been disabled by disease--is commendable, the actual effect of the bill would be to create an automatic federal handout to anyone who has worked in the mines for 30 years or more, even if no disability exists.

The President is certainly in favor of disability payments to miners who have become disabled because of their work. About 1/2 million beneficiaries are already receiving about \$1 billion under existing Black Lung legislation. But to authorize another \$200 million for miners disability benefits without requiring evidence of black lung disease is just not fair or reasonable.

Will the President veto the bill?

GUIDANCE: We won't know that until we see what happens in the Senate.

ME