



Joint Select Committee *on the Solvency of Multiemployer Pension Plans*

For Immediate Release
Friday, July 13, 2018
Contact: Jenny Donohue/Matt Keyes
202-224-3978

BROWN OPENING STATEMENT AT JOINT PENSION COMMITTEE FIELD HEARING

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) – co-chair of the Joint Select Committee on the Solvency of Multiemployer Pension Plans – released the following opening statement at today’s hearing.

Opening Statement of Senator Brown – Pensions Hearing on Understanding What’s at Stake for Current Workers and Retirees

July 13, 2018

This field hearing of the Joint Select Committee on the Solvency of Multiemployer Pension Plans will come to order. Thank you to Senator Portman for his work on the committee and for helping us bring this hearing to Ohio.

Thank you to all the witnesses here today.

Thank you to the thousands of Teamsters, mineworkers, ironworkers, carpenters, bakers, and so many others who have come to Columbus both yesterday and today. They represent more than a million Americans around the country who are at risk of losing the pensions they earned over a lifetime of work.

It’s because of their activism that we created this committee. And we must be successful.

I want to acknowledge one of those very special people, Rita Lewis.

Rita’s late husband, Butch Lewis, was the head of Teamsters Local 100, in Evendale, Ohio.

He helped lead the fight to save his fellow teamsters' pensions, and he passed away far too soon, fighting for the retirement security they earned.

Rita has continued Butch's fight. And we honored his memory by naming our bill after him – the Butch Lewis Act.

Rita once told me retirees and workers struggling with this crisis feel like they are invisible.

Well you aren't invisible to me. You aren't invisible to Senator Portman and Senator Manchin and Representatives Neal, Scott, Norcross, Dingell, and every member of this committee – both those who could be here today and those who could not.

We see you. We hear you. And we are here to fight for the solution you deserve.

Today is about listening to your stories.

This crisis threatens the pensions of more than 1.3 million Americans and more than 60,000 Ohioans – pensions they earned through a lifetime of hard work.

It threatens current workers who are paying into pensions they might never see a penny of if we don't act. It threatens thousands of small businesses. It threatens our economy.

It affects Americans in every state in the country. It affects union and non-union workers alike.

That's why we see groups as diverse as the Chamber of Commerce and labor unions and the AARP all pushing for a solution.

We know it won't be easy. But we created this committee so that Congress would be forced to stop ducking hard choices.

For the past three months, we've been educating members and their staffs. We have assembled a team of experts from the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation and the Department of Labor.

The committee has conducted a dozen bipartisan staff briefings, with at least ten more to come. We've received thousands of comments online at pensions.senate.gov.

We are committed to getting this done.

Rob, I'm glad you're on this committee.

I think people in Ohio know that we have a history of putting partisanship and talking points aside, and getting things done – whether it's the Leveling the Playing Field Act and fighting for our steel industry, or fighting for Ohio jobs at places like the Whirlpool plant in Clyde.

Whether it's making sure that the Health Coverage Tax Credit got extended for the Delphi Retirees, funding the Great Lakes cleanup, or passing laws to combat the opioid epidemic. I'm proud of the work we've done together.

The people in this room know how we work together – it's why both Ohio senators have had strong support from Teamsters and Miners. They know the two of us have always put partisanship aside and put Ohio's working families first.

They trust us to put that same effort into solving this, together.

I've put out a proposal – the Butch Lewis Act – I think it's a good place to start. But everyone here knows we can't get anything done unless we work together.

That's why I am open to any solution that protects workers, retirees, and businesses. I am ready and willing to make changes. Or to work on new solutions. I too want to hear any idea that brings us closer to a bipartisan compromise.

Too much is at stake to retreat into partisan corners.

You've said this before and I agree – we have to get off our talking points, listen to all ideas, and work in good faith.

That's what the people who are counting on us deserve – the people in this room, and the millions of retirees and workers, and thousands of small businesses they represent.

I want to thank everyone here today for making your voices heard and helping the committee and the American people understand what is at stake.

You have refused to give up and we won't either.

I yield to Senator Portman for his opening statement.

###