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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
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CHARLES J. HOUY, STAFF DIRECTOR  
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March 23, 2009

Dear Friends:

I thank the U.S. Department of Labor and the Mine Safety and Health Administration for commemorating the anniversary of the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969. It is four decades later, and I am still proud of my role in the formulation and passage of this groundbreaking, landmark legislation, and so pleased that I have been asked to participate in this celebration.

My father was a coal miner. I married a coal miner's daughter. When I talk about coal miners, I am not simply referring to an occupational category. I am talking about my family, my friends, and my neighbors.

Growing up in the southern West Virginia coal fields, I saw the bodies of too many coal diggers pulled from the coal mines after an explosion. I have helped carry the coffins of too many miners who perished in mine accidents. To this day I still recall the faces of the widows and the children of these miners.

From my earliest days in the United States Congress, I have been emotionally committed to improving the health and safety conditions of the men and women who work in our nation's coal mines. I have sponsored and supported legislation to expand and improve federal mine safety laws.

Then on November 20, 1968 came the horrific explosion at Farmington #9 which took the lives of 78 West Virginia coal miners. I was sick. I was saddened. I was mad. I was determined to do something. Upon hearing of that tragedy, I went to the Senate floor and declared: "The time has come to do more than cope with menaces that can wipe out 78 lives in a single horrible accident. We can and must eliminate these hazards."

MSHA

March 23, 2010

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In response to that horrible tragedy, Congress approved Public Law 91-173, the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969, the most comprehensive legislation covering the mining industry in history, and to this day, the strongest worker protection law in the world.

This legislation had an immediate and life altering impact. Early in the twentieth century, coal mining was taking the lives of 1,000 to 3,000 coal miners each year. In the years just before the act was adopted, it was not unusual to have 250 miners killed in a single year. By the 1990s, the number had dropped dramatically.

During the past few years, the tragedies at Sago, Aracoma, and Crandell Canyon have served as deadly reminders that coal-mining safety rules and regulations are only as good and effective as the people who are there to enforce them.

Let us not forget the health questions. Black lung still exists and in fact is on the increase. The protection for miners also needs to increase.

Congress may write the laws, but the Administration, the Department of Labor, MSHA, and, most importantly, the mine inspectors must be ready and willing to enforce mine safety laws. I am confident that today's commemoration of the historic 1969 Coal Act is a vivid symbol of the present Administration's commitment to enforcing our Nation's coal mine health and safety laws. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of it.

Sincerely yours,



Robert C. Byrd