



Leo W. Gerard
International President

April 27, 2015

VIA EMAIL

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

I write on behalf of the 1.2 million active and retired members of the United Steelworkers (USW) in strong support of the Robert C. Byrd Mine Safety Protection Act of 2015 introduced by Congressman Scott (D-VA), Congresswoman Wilson (D-FL), and Congressman Courtney (D-CT). Nearly 19,000 USW members work in over 170 MSHA-covered mines and need the improvements to safety conditions that this bill provides. The Act will enhance compliance with existing mine safety and health laws, empower miners to raise safety concerns and prevent tragedies similar to the Upper Big Branch disaster that killed 29 miners in 2010.

Mines continue to be among the most dangerous workplaces in this country. Six USW members lost their lives in six separate incidents while at work at mines in Arizona, Idaho, Montana, and New Mexico since 2010.

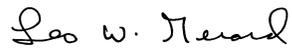
Congress has failed to act for the last four years since the Upper Big Branch disaster, which was the worst mining disaster in recent U.S. history and an event we must prevent from happening again. This legislation addresses the factors that contributed to the Upper Big Branch disaster by addressing specific hazards for coal miners. How many more must die before action is taken?

Our USW mining members primarily work in metal-nonmetal mines; and MSHA, to its credit, works with miners and their unions and with mine operators to ensure safety in all mines. However, improvements are needed. The Robert C. Byrd Mine Safety Protection Act of 2015 makes common-sense changes to MSHA such as requiring electronic recordkeeping, consistency in the methods used to propose and assess penalties, and inspections on all shifts and days of the week. It also requires contractors' full injury and illness reports. Mine operators commonly use contractors to do work on the site, and failing to report contractor illness and injury information can give a misguided impression of safety.

This bill also ensures that miners know about and have the right to speak out about unsafe conditions in their workplace. It requires that miners be verbally told about hazards from the previous shift before they enter the mine. Of particular importance, it also strengthens anti-retaliation protections for workers who report hazardous conditions, injuries or illnesses caused by work.

The USW urges you to support the Robert C. Byrd Mine Safety Protection Act of 2015. Congress cannot wait until after the next disaster to take action. We have an obligation to protect our miners by improving compliance with current law and empowering them to speak out about hazards in their workplace.

Sincerely,



Leo W. Gerard
International President

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