

DAVID B. MCKINLEY, P.E.

1ST DISTRICT, WEST VIRGINIA

412 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

TEL: (202) 225-4172

FAX: (202) 225-7564

www.mckinley.house.gov

CO-CHAIR,
CONGRESSIONAL ARTHRITIS CAUCUS

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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

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ENVIRONMENT AND THE ECONOMY

May 20, 2014

Mr. Don Blankenship
P.O. Box 1757
Williamson, WV 25661

Dear Mr. Blankenship,

Thank you for reaching out regarding the Upper Big Branch disaster. Four years after that tragedy it's important that we never forget the 29 men who died there. Mining coal can be a dangerous job, and we should all do our part to ensure miners have safe working conditions and can come home safely to their family after each shift.

Since arriving in Congress in January 2011, I've worked with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to improve mine safety and have introduced several pieces of legislation to improve the health and safety of miners, including bills to:

- Provide research grants for coal mine safety and black lung treatment and prevention. It only makes sense that if a company is fined by MSHA, the money should go towards improving the safety and health of miners instead of the government's coffers;
- Reduce the nearly 50 pages of redundant paperwork when applying for black lung benefits; and
- Add funding to the Brookwood-Sago Mine Safety Grants programs. Specifically, this legislation will fund programs that provide hands-on mine safety skills training and certification in mine rescue and mine emergency response.

During the appropriations process, I will continue to work to ensure MSHA has the necessary funding to protect our miners, and also ensure they are fully accountable and base their determinations on scientific facts, not political agendas.

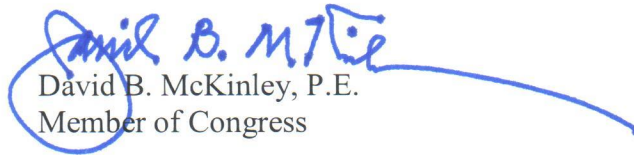
There are several reports from the government and outside organizations investigating what happened at Upper Big Branch. These reports include a number of theories about what caused the explosion. While the MSHA report cites a buildup of methane and coal dust, you contend an inundation of natural gas caused the explosion. I am not an expert on this, so I am not in a position to say what theory is more accurate.

What we can agree on is ensuring this doesn't happen again. Everyone from coal operators to state and federal agencies have a responsibility to follow the law and prevent another disaster. If there is a deficiency in the law, then it's up to Congress to act. In your letter, you mentioned

several changes that would help prevent another disaster like Upper Big Branch. Please feel free to provide these specific recommendations to me.

Coal miners are the reason I fight each day for the future of our industry. They represent the human side of the equation. Miners are not simply numbers and statistics; they are our brothers and sisters, parents, grandparents and uncles. We all need to find ways to make their jobs safer so they can go home at night.

Respectfully,


David B. McKinley, P.E.
Member of Congress