

**Statement by Senator Tom Harkin  
On the 40th Anniversary of the  
Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act  
March 18, 2010**

On the 40th Anniversary of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act, we have much to celebrate. I want to take this opportunity to thank Secretary Solis and Assistant Secretary Joe Main for their outstanding leadership and dedication to achieving the highest level of health and safety. America's miners deserve no less.

The Coal Mine Act established the strongest and most comprehensive mine worker safety standards and health protections ever. This landmark legislation paved the way for future improvements in the mining industry and additional protections for miners, including creation of the Mine Safety and Health Administration with the passage of the 1977 Federal Mine Safety and Health Act. I was pleased to play a major role in enacting the Miner Improvement and New Emergency Response Act of 2006. The lives of thousands of miners have been saved and the number of accidents at coal mines reduced because of the strong reforms enacted over the years. This march of progress began with the signing of the Coal Mine Act.

The 79 miners killed in the 1968 Farmington mine explosion will forever be remembered. It was outrage over their tragic deaths that led to passage of the Coal Mine Act. However, the fact that thousands of miners have been killed on the job over the ensuing four decades is a daily reminder that much more needs to be done to improve mine workplace safety.

On this anniversary, we also honor those that have been injured or made ill as a result of working in our coal mines. This is personal with me. My father was a coal miner who developed devastating chronic lung problems as a result of working many years in the mines. I know what it's like to lose a family member who suffered from an occupationally caused disease. While fatalities have declined in subsequent years, black lung still claims about 1,000 lives annually and is currently on the rise. The Coal Mine Act, which mandated the eradication of black lung in the coal mining industry, marked the first time Congress had called for eliminating an occupational disease in a major industry.

Again, we have a long way to go. But thanks to technological advances and continued progress in the improvement of mineworker safety, and with a huge assist from the Department's End Black Lung Initiative, we are

redoubling our commitment to minimizing miners' exposure to the dangers of coal mine dust.

It is heartening to know that the Department of Labor is, once again, being led by a team that is passionately committed to workers' safety – not only in coal mines, but in all of our workplaces. Never again should we put profits ahead of people and their safety. I salute everyone in the Department for your dedication to this all-important mission.