

Remarks of U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall, II  
Before the MSHA Black Lung Prevention Event  
Beaver, West Virginia  
December 3, 2009

I would first like to express my deep appreciation to Joe Main for conducting this event today. During Joe's tenure with the United Mine Workers of America I regularly consulted with him on matters pertaining to coal mine safety. In his new capacity, I look forward to his continued leadership on improving the lot of the coal miner.

On this day, I believe it is more than appropriate to recognize the ultimate sacrifice thousands of coal miners who have perished from the crippling disease known as black lung have made to the energy security of their Nation.

On this day, I extend condolences to the families of coal miners who died as a result of years of inhaling coal dust in the mines.

And on this day, we gather to give hope to those who descend deep into the earth to produce the coal which fostered the Industrial Revolution in this country and which now fires the Technological Revolution.

Despite the fact that the Congress in 1969 passed landmark legislation to put an end to black lung disease -- contracted over years of inhaling respirable coal dust in the mines -- annually around 1,400 miners still perish from this affliction.

The Louisville *Courier-Journal* once described it in this way: "It's as if the Titanic sank every year, and no ships came to the rescue. While that long-ago disaster continues to fascinate the nation, the miners slip into cold, early graves almost unnoticed."

We have made advances, yes, but we have not yet satisfactorily solved the problem.

For many year, I pushed legislation to improve the black lung benefits program. That effort gave rise to administrative changes made by the Clinton Administration to create a more victim friendly adjudication process.

During the Bush Administration, I stood on the floor of the House of Representatives to try to stop a proposed regulation that would have allowed a fourfold increase of respirable dust in the mines. That regulation was never made final.

And in the aftermath of the disasters at Saga and Aracoma, all of us gathered together – mineworkers, industry and legislators – to gain the enactment of the Miner Act.

But like I said, much more needs to be done.

So I commend the Mine Safety and Health Administration for implementing a comprehensive black lung prevention strategy with the goal of further reducing the occurrence of black lung disease.

We owe it to the coal miner. We owe it to their families. And we owe it to ourselves as beneficiaries of their toil.

Thank you all for being here today, and God Speed on the work ahead of you.