

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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Press Office, 202-226-0853

Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On “The Perspective of the Families at Crandall Canyon”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “The Perspective of the Families at Crandall Canyon.”*

Good morning. Welcome to today’s hearing on “The Perspective of the Families at Crandall Canyon.”

In August, we all watched the unfolding tragedy at the Crandall Canyon Mine with deep sadness. After the collapse, six miners never came out of the mine again. Three brave rescuers, attempting to reach their fellow miners, also died.

Family members of those miners and rescuers who perished are with us today.

On behalf of all of my colleagues, I want to express our sympathies to each of you and your families. I know your testimony today will be painful for you to deliver. But it is critical for us to hear from you directly. I thank you very much for agreeing to participate in today’s hearing.

I would like to also thank all of the brave miners involved in the rescue effort. We greatly admire their devotion and selflessness, and we wish a speedy recovery to the injured rescuers.

I would also like to extend our gratitude to Governor Jon Huntsman and Congressman Jim Matheson for their concern and involvement in helping the families and miners during the rescue efforts, and for joining us.

Today we will first hear from a panel of family members about how this tragedy has affected them, and then we will hear from a panel of leaders and policymakers to provide further context for this tragedy and what we must learn from it. I will be introducing all of those witnesses shortly.

This month, the Committee intends to consider additional legislation that would build on legislation approved by Congress last year to improve mine safety.

The committee is also committed to a thorough investigation of what happened at the Crandall Canyon Mine.

In late August we requested a comprehensive list of critical documents and communications from both Murray Energy Corporation and the Department of Labor to help us with our independent investigation of the Crandall Canyon Mine tragedy.

I regret to say that neither the Department nor the company have been fully cooperative with us. They have yet to comply with even many basic requests for information – information that is necessary for the Committee to investigate this disaster.

But let me be very clear. This committee will not be deterred from getting all the information we need to do our independent investigation. We will not tolerate obstruction or delay by the Department of Labor. And we will not tolerate obstruction or delay from the Murray Energy Corporation or from Mr. Murray himself.

We will take every action necessary to hold individuals responsible for what appears to have been a preventable tragedy. We believe it is critical to get to the truth of the events before, during, and after this disaster in order to prevent another one.

The families of the miners who died, the miners who continue to work underground, and the communities in which they live deserve to know the straight facts.

We have carefully documented in the past year that the Department of Labor has seriously neglected its responsibility to miners.

Over the past few years, the Department has cut staffing levels for inspectors, torpedoed health and safety regulations, and hired top officials who came right of the coal industry.

Today, the Department of Labor is failing to move decisively to require mines to have modern, state-of-the-art wireless communications as soon as the technology becomes available.

It is failing to require rescue chambers, as West Virginia has done, that could immediately provide safe haven to trapped miners.

It is failing to track compliance with rescue plans submitted by mine operators.

And it failed to take control of communications with the public after the Crandall Canyon disaster, as the law requires. Instead, the Department of Labor allowed Mr. Murray to repeatedly provide false information to families and the public.

The lessons learned from Crandall Canyon will take some time to sort out. There will be no easy or quick answers.

But this hearing, as well as future hearings and the results of our investigation, will help us learn what steps are necessary to make mining safer for those who go underground every day.

I thank you all for coming today.

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