

Remarks to the Committee on Education and Labor

U.S. House of Representatives

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BIOGRAPHY

Wayne Holland Jr. is the staff representative for the United Steel Workers in Utah and northern Nevada and is himself a third generation copper miner. Mr. Holland's responsibilities include representing over 1300 hard rock copper miners, with over 500 of these workers employed in MSHA regulated mining and concentrating facilities. Mr. Holland has been involved in MSHA training as a worker and as a trainer of Miners Representatives and Joint Safety and Health Committees in the Copper mining industry.

Also, Mr. Holland is chair of the Utah Democratic Party.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Congressman Matheson, and members of the committee for inviting me here today to offer my perspective on the tragedy at Crandall Canyon Mine.

First let me say that every Utahn, and that includes myself as chair and the Democratic Party of Utah, should commend Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. The governor's progressive bi-partisan approach is the approach I hope Congress will take. The governor's appointment of his Democratic opponent during the last election, Scott Matheson, one of Utah's most distinguished and respected citizens, to lead our state investigation has created confidence that the process will result in a constructive outcome.

The tragedy of the initial collapse that killed six miners on Aug. 6 was magnified when the mountain came down on their rescuers several days later. As someone who has been

closely involved with attempts to hold mine owners accountable for worker safety for most of his adult life, I know that these events have significant and long-lasting impact on mining communities.

The nation's miners employed in both underground and open-pit mining operations total about 225,000. In the past 21 months, 121 miners have died in U.S. mining operations. This year alone, 24 miners have died in coal mines and 25 have died in metal/non-metal mines. Our government owes our nation's miners a great deal. A great deal more than the fact the Utah and American miners receive less on-the-job protection than miners in Germany, Canada, Australia, and, in some ways even, Turkey.

It's been a tough summer. The people of Carbon and Emory counties just want to get back to the business of living: working at decent paying jobs, making sure their kids are OK in school, going to church, enjoying Utah's spectacular high-mountain country. They deserve to know that as they try to get on with their lives that their government will implement effective protections and assure aggressive enforcement.

Mr. Chairman, you, your committee, and members of this and the previous Congress are to be congratulated for leadership in protecting our miners. You acted decisively in pushing through the MINER Act of 2006.

But in the immortal words of Yogi Berra, "It seems like déjà vu all over again."

Mr. Chairman, when you introduced the 2007 mine safety and health bills on June 19, you said the MINER Act of 2006 was (quote) "intended only as a down payment on what was needed to clean up years of neglect and backsliding by this Administration and an industry that had become, by its own admission, overly complacent." (end quote)

You said implementation had been slower than anticipated.

You said (quote) “Last year we acted with urgency but too late; this year, it is our hope to enact needed legislation before the next tragedy occurs.” (end quote)

Again, that was on June 19.

Sixty-five days later, at 2:48 a.m., a mountain in Wasatch Plateau came down on six miners working a seam of coal about 2,000 feet below ground. Ten days later, at 6:39 p.m., nine rescuers were buried when the mountain came down again. Six made it out alive.

Mr. Chairman, these men were heroes.

Coal miners in Utah and their families understand the dangers of being inside an unstable mountain. They know the signals the mountain sends. The most recent had occurred just four days earlier. They know about the disaster in Alabama, for instance, in which 12 miners died September 2001 trying to get to one injured miner.

They went inside anyway.

Mr. Chairman, I am not a mining engineer. I do not know for a fact that Crandall Canyon Mine was too dangerous under the mining conditions employed by the operator and very questionable mining plan.

I do not know that so-called “retreat mining” should never have been allowed.

This is what I do know:

I know that when I go back to Helper or Price, Huntington, Castle Dale or Orangeville I want to be able to walk down the street and if the widow, wife, or children of a miner comes up to me, I want to say, “**NEVER AGAIN**. Those guys back in Washington are

doing whatever they possibly can to make sure you won't have to go through the horror of last summer never, ever again.”

I know that NEVER AGAIN should the dedicated public servants of MSHA fear losing their jobs because they stand up to a mine owner with political connections and refuse to sacrifice worker safety.

I know that NEVER AGAIN should any administration be allowed to appoint a Secretary of Labor without the experience and background necessary to assure that America's working families get the protections and enforcement they deserve.

Miners and their families don't want empty rhetoric.

They demand that their representatives here in Washington examine life-saving and proven technologies – including wireless communication devices, safe haven chambers, and personal tracking devices – that have been widely used by underground miners all over the world.

They demand MSHA have the enforcement authority to do its job, with miners and their families getting the uppermost consideration.

Mr. Chairman, I cannot close with words more eloquent than those you chose in June: (quote) “As we focus this year on how to address this country's energy problems, let us not forget to provide for the safety and health of the workers who provide the raw materials that power this country.”

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to tell the people back in Emory and Carbon counties that Congress will not wait for any more miners to die before it acts.

Thank you. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

