

Deborah Hammer
Testimony
3/28/07

Good Morning. Thank you for
inviting me to speak at this
hearing, today

I Am Deborah Hamner. My husband,
George Junior Hamner died in the Sago
Mine Disaster. He had been a Coal
miner for about 28 yrs. Junior was
54 yrs old. We had been married for
32 yrs, and have 1 daughter, Sara Bailey.
Junior and I have a farm where he
kept cattle. He loved the outdoors.

I attended Congressman Miller's Forum
on Miners' Health and Safety last yr in Feb.

After the death of 47 miners last yr in America, I am here today to stress to you that our work is not done. It is very important that Congress oversees MSHA to ensure the improvements you intended with the "Miner Act of 2006" are being accomplished.

Despite Congress' good intentions, I have to wonder if little has actually changed. I fear that miners would fair no better today in an explosion than my husband and his co-workers did on 1/2/06.

The "Miner Act" required extra
Air Supplies be AVAILABLE. This
seems so simple. Yet 1 yr later,
many miners still only have 1 hr.
MSHA Allows coal companies to be
in compliance if additional SCSRs
have been ordered.

The "Miner Act" Also required
operators to submit emergency
response plans. Yet 1 yr later
many operators are not in
compliance.

I believe Sago was preventable.
If I knew then what I know
today, I would have begged my
husband not to work at Sago.

It is my understanding that in
69 and again in 77, Congress mandated
"explosion proof seals," yet MSHA
approved the use of Omega Blocks
at Sago. They failed in the explosion..
When I had the opportunity to kick
one of these blocks. The side crumbled.
How can they be explosion proof? I ask
you to permanently ban the use of
Omega Blocks.

MSHA Approved bottom mining
 At Sago. This created heights in
 many Areas that were more than
 18ft. Methane accumulated behind
 the seals in a greater volume
 than it would have without the
 bottom mining. Bottom mining
 is rare and I AM ASKING
 Congress to BAN it.

My husband wrote in his last note to me, "The section is full of smoke + fumes so we can't escape."

MSHA approved a ventilation plan at Sago that did not course the air away from the seats. Therefore, when our miners tried to exit thru the intake escapeway, they could not. Miners must have ventilation systems that insure their best protection in case they need to escape.

Our Sago Miners should have been able to WALK out. I urge you :

to - see that current communication technology is installed in all mines.

- Require tracking devices that can locate miners underground at all times,

- And - require safety chambers in all mines.

Congress must ensure funding

for mine inspectors and mine inspections.

MSHA must quit reducing fines and must do a better job of collecting

fines. MSHA must have the ability

to shut down mines not in compliance,

My last request to you is: please quit allowing coal industry executives to hold high positions within MSHA,

We need your continued oversight to ensure human life never has to take a backseat to corporate profits.

Thank you for your hard work on miner's health and safety and your continued hard work.