



SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO  
2ND DISTRICT, WEST VIRGINIA

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES  
RANKING MEMBER  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND  
COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITY

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ENERGY INDEPENDENCE  
AND GLOBAL WARMING

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515-4802

2443 RAYBURN H.O.B.  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-4802  
202-225-2711

4815 MACCORKLE AVE.  
CHARLESTON, WV 25304  
304-925-5964

300 FOXCROFT AVE.  
SUITE 102  
MARTINSBURG, WV 25401  
304-264-8810

[WWW.HOUSE.GOV/CAPITO](http://WWW.HOUSE.GOV/CAPITO)

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National Mine Health and Safety Academy  
1301 Airport Road  
Beaver, West Virginia 25813-9426

Dear Friends:

Thank you for inviting me to join you for today's public hearing to discuss mine safety along with the government's outreach plans regarding a comprehensive black lung reduction strategy. Unfortunately, my congressional duties require my presence in Washington, but I applaud the conversations taking place today and look forward to taking part in the weeks and months ahead.

In a state like West Virginia, we understand that coal is a critical component of our local economy, but we also understand the significant need for sound health and safety practices. Ensuring the health and safety of West Virginia miners is simply part of the mining process – particularly when it comes to health hazards like black lung disease.

Without question we've made a great deal of progress in recent decades, leading to comparatively fewer cases of the disease and enhanced preventive technology over the long term. Yet, that progress can only be sustained through continued education and the strict adherence to established safety practices. We cannot allow the lower prevalence of the disease to influence perceptions regarding its danger. As such, education must be at the forefront of any campaign to combat black lung.

It is with this education component that I believe today's discussion can have the most impact. Though black lung disease may not be as prevalent as it once was, it is still a hazard for which we must prepare.

Finally, while today's primary focus is on black lung disease, we must also remember that strong safety practices are critical across the entirety of mining operations. As we learned first-hand at the Sago Mine, nothing can substitute for adequate safety procedures that protect miners.

Again, I thank you for the invitation to join today's discussion. If I can be of service, please do not hesitate to contact any of my offices.

Sincerely,

Shelley Moore Capito, M.C.