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# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

December 10, 2009

Mr. Joseph A. Main  
U.S. Assistant Secretary of Labor for  
Mine Safety and Health Administration  
1100 Wilson Boulevard 21<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Arlington, Virginia 22209-3939

Dear Joe:

Thank you for the invitation to join you today in Lebanon. I regret that the House is in session, and for that reason I am not able to attend. I appreciate this opportunity to submit this letter providing my remarks on the state of the black lung program and the need for its improvement.

I am deeply concerned about the recent increase in the occurrence of black lung disease, especially among younger miners. It is disturbing that the reason for the increase, given the technological advances employed in coal mining, is unknown. I, therefore, welcome the announcement of MSHA's comprehensive strategy to address the problem.

During the 27 years of my service in Congress, I have assisted hundreds of coal miners and their families in their efforts to obtain the black lung benefits to which they are entitled. Providing this assistance has been and will continue to be one of my priorities.

I strongly support every effort to ensure that the black lung related needs of coal miners and their dependents are met by the federal government. To that end, I recently co-authored the Black Lung Benefits Survivors Equity Act, which would allow black lung benefits recipients' survivors to continue to receive these payments after the beneficiaries' deaths without having to reapply for the benefits. You can be assured that I will continue these efforts to support our coal miners and their families.

Joe, I want to express my deep appreciation to you for today's meeting and for announcing a plan to develop a comprehensive black lung prevention strategy with the goal of eliminating the occurrence of black lung disease. Coal plays an integral role in the economy of Southwest Virginia. The coal miners who risk their lives and health to the benefit of our entire nation deserve all our efforts to eradicate black lung disease.

With kind regards and best wishes, I remain

Sincerely,

Rick Boucher  
Member of Congress

RB/III