

Remarks of
Joseph A. Main, Assistant Secretary of Labor
for Mine Safety and Health
Upper Big Branch Mine Miners Memorial Dedication
Whitesville, W.Va.
July 27, 2012

We are here today to dedicate a monument in remembrance of the 29 miners who lost their lives in the tragic coal mine disaster that occurred on April 5, 2010 at the Upper Big Branch Mine. The miners we remember today were a special breed of Americans --- tough, hard-working, caring, and with a sense of responsibility for others. We will all remember the personal stories we learned about them from families and friends over the past couple of years. They were good people, and represent the best of America.

While the monument being unveiled today is a tribute to those fallen miners, it is more than that. It is a marker we are placing on this spot on the earth as a reminder that we can never forget and that we must not let these tragedies involving the loss of miners' lives ever happen again.

During my lifetime I, like many here today, have attended more funerals and memorials for miners who lost their lives in coal mining tragedies than I care to remember. We will never forget the lingering grief and sorrow in the faces of those who lost loved ones. I know that the impact that this tragedy has had on the families and friends of the miners lost is not measurable, and most of us cannot begin to imagine the grief you experience every day.

But what we can tell you is this: we will work hard to do all we can so others will not suffer the anguish that these tragedies leave behind.

As President Obama said of miners immediately following the tragedy, “We owe them more than prayers. We owe them action. We owe them accountability. We owe them an assurance that when they go to work every day, when they enter that dark mine, they are not alone. They ought to know that behind them there is a company that’s doing what it takes to protect them, and a government that is looking out for their safety.”

Every worker has a right to a safe and healthy workplace and should be able to go to work, do their jobs, and return home to their families safe and healthy at the end of every shift.

Today, I speak for President Obama, Secretary of Labor Solis, and myself, in saying that this Administration has worked tirelessly to get to the bottom of what happened at Upper Big Branch and to take the steps necessary to see that our miners' families don't have to suffer the loss that our friends in West Virginia were forced to endure.

We know that there was a workplace culture prevalent at Upper Big Branch valuing production over safety, including practices that fostered and encouraged non-compliance with safety and health laws. The mining community cannot endure this kind of disregard for human life, and it should not have to.

The tragedy also identified that more needed to be done to provide miners with a voice in the work place, and to hold those who flaunted the mine safety laws more accountable. It inspired

us to redouble our efforts to aggressively enforce the Mine Act, and we continue to move forward to maximize the positive impact we can have on the lives of our nation's miners.

It's true that mine safety is the law. But it's more than that to those of us who have made a life in mining. It's a promise to a wife, a husband, or a child. A promise that when a miner leaves home to begin their workday, that they'll be back after their shift - healthy and whole. It is that basic ideal that we all share, a common thread that links miners throughout a town, a state, and a nation.

All of us know mines can be operated safely and while many live up to that responsibility, there are those that do not. We know that more needs to be done to improve mine safety and health and instill a culture of prevention in the mining industry that

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reflects the values of those who give so much of themselves to provide for their families, and enrich their communities.

We cannot change the events of April 5, 2010 , but we can and will act to ensure that those who died at Upper Big Branch did not die in vain. We all owe this to all of our nation's miners.