

RAHALL *Report*

MINE SAFETY

by Congressman Nick J. Rahall

The importance of safe and healthy working conditions for coal miners has again come to the attention of the American people. Unfortunately, this awareness has been increased by three fatal mine disasters--in West Virginia, Kentucky, and in Tennessee.

24 coal miners have been killed in a five-day period, and my deepest condolences go out to their families and friends.

More than most occupations, coal mining takes its toll on the men and women who devote their working lives to it. But, they are willing to provide the nation with the energy it needs and realize the dangers that lurk in the underground mines.

I have a great deal of respect for our coal miners, and it was this respect that caused me to criticize the Mine Safety and Health Administration last September for not carrying through on Federal-mandated inspections of coal mines in southern West Virginia.

I told MSHA at that time, "The fact that these inspections are not being carried out is a travesty of the law that we in Congress worked hard to implement. This neglect not only shows a lax concern for mine safety, it is putting lives in jeopardy."

Furthermore, the Reagan Administration's budget cutting efforts are having a negative impact on funding for mine safety. To me, it is a gamble--a gamble with God's greatest gift--life.

I adhere to the belief that one miner injured is one too many, that one case of black lung disease is one too many, and that one miner killed is certainly one too many.

The three recent accidents appear to have different causes, and investigations are underway. MSHA admits that there have been fewer inspections in recent years, but that no reduction in safety took place in any of the mines.

With the Reagan Administration calling for the elimination of 150 mine inspectors, I feel such action proves that the Administration's attitude towards mine safety is not strong enough.

I have always been committed to increased coal production and utilization, but in no way will allow for any weakening of safety programs for coal miners.