

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4804

ENERGY AND NATURAL  
RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

April 7, 2016

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on  
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on  
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510


Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

Six years and one day after 29 brave miners were tragically killed at the Upper Big Branch mine, former Massey Energy CEO Don Blankenship received one year in prison, the maximum allowable sentence, for willfully conspiring to violate mine safety standards. On April 30th, 2015, Senator Casey and I introduced the Robert C. Byrd Mine Safety Protection Act (S. 1145) to, among other things, make it a felony for mine operators to knowingly violate safety standards. I urge you to bring this piece of legislation before your committee as soon as possible.

In addition to holding executive leadership accountable, the Robert C. Byrd Mine Safety Act (S. 1145) would close loopholes in the 1952 Federal Coal Mine Safety Act and enhance the Mine Safety and Health Administration's ability to enforce the law. The legislation also includes important whistleblower protections for miners who report unsafe working conditions.

I stood with the families of the beloved miners in the days following the devastating tragedy at Upper Big Branch. Through moments of hope and despair, I witnessed again and again the unbreakable bonds of family. While no sentence or amount of jail time will ever heal the hearts of the families who have been forever devastated, I believe we have a responsibility to do everything we can in Congress to ensure that a tragedy like this never happens again, and I look forward to working with you to move this bill through the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

Sincerely,



Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator