

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KENNEDY, HELP COMMITTEE LEADERS VISIT WEST VIRGINIA; MEET WITH SAGO MINE FAMILIES, MINE WORKERS; CHECK PROGRESS OF INVESTIGATION

Washington, D.C. Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Health Education Labor Pensions (HELP) Committee Ranking Member, Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the HELP Committee, Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA), and Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) today met with the families of Sago Mine workers whose lives were lost early this year, as well as officials of the International Coal Group (ICG) and Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) in West Virginia.

"You're not really going to get closure for these families about what happened to their loved ones - their brothers, their fathers, their sons - in that part of the mine which was dark, dreary and where they were losing hope until all the truth comes out and all the facts are on the table," Senator Kennedy said. "Then and only then will those families be able to look forward to a future with hope. Meeting today with the loved ones of the Sago mine tragedy has only renewed the urgent need for mining safety and enforcement to be placed front and center, as well as research into mining technology," Kennedy said. "Violations and the subsequent penalties should be increased and enforced. Americans deserve a safe workplace and we have the tools and technology to help prevent future mining tragedies. We need to get the job done and get it done right "

"All of us are working together to ensure that we are fully informed of the progress of the joint investigation underway by MSHA and the state of West Virginia," Enzi said. "We will hold hearings in Washington later this month and in March to review, evaluate, and contribute to the important investigative work already under way here. After listening to the families and mine workers of West Virginia today, I have a better understanding of what needs to be done to help spare other mining families from the loss of sons, fathers, and husbands in the future."

"I have experienced today one of the most moving two hours of my life in the very candid and open discussions with the families of those miners who were killed. I pledged to them as chairman of the subcommittee on mine safety that the questions they asked will be answered and that the legacy of this tragedy will be that we heed the lessons we learn so that lives are not lost in the future," Isakson said.

"As hearings begin in the coming days and weeks, it will be imperative that we not only determine what happened at Sago, but we must also look at ways to improve mine safety across West Virginia and across the country," said Rockefeller. "What I hope today's visit provides is momentum to accomplish the most important mine safety legislation of a generation."

Enzi and Kennedy are working together to hold an oversight hearing into mine safety procedures and enforcement measures related to the Sago mine tragedy that took the lives of 12 miners in early March. In addition, Enzi is expediting the confirmation process for the President's nominee to head the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), Richard Stickler, whose nomination is pending before the HELP Committee. Stickler's nomination will be considered during a January 31 hearing, which will also include the nomination of Edwin Foulke to serve as the head of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

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