

Memorial Edition

 **coal energy**
From the Mine to the Utility

*Upper Big Branch
Mine Memorial*

April 5th 2010
Remembering our Loved Ones

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-In memory of April 5th, 2010-

By : Erin Sincavich

*For every mother, father, brother, sister, child and wife,
For every West Virginian, April 5th has changed our life.
Like any other day, those brave men walked into their mine,
Surely having no idea that it'd be for the last time.*

*All the prayers and wishes offered up from all around
Were dedicated to those men who were trapped there underground.
The families, the friends, the ones who made it home,
The rescuers who searched for days, all knew they weren't alone.*

*And though the news came slow, and for many way too late,
Hopefully healing will begin now that we know their fate.
For God blessed every step they took on the country roads that lead them home,
And He waited there with open arms in the place that they belong.*

*Their days will grant them beauty more than they ever knew on earth,
As their humble ways and brotherhood will always keep their worth.
They'll forever see the countryside just as they did while here,
And they know now more than ever what it means to be a Mountaineer.*

*To everyone who was touched by this unfortunate event,
To everyone who kept an eye on how the progress went,
We'll never forget this tragic loss even as the years grow long,
This way of life is what we know and it's what keeps us strong.*

*So never take for granted when you turn your porch light on,
Those men who risk their lives each day and those men who are gone.
And if you're fortunate enough to have a miner in your life too,
Be thankful when he comes home safe and tell him, "I love You."*



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letter from the publisher

Dear Readers,

April 5th 2010 changed our lives forever.

As the totality of the tragedy was unveiled, the miners were described as fathers, sons, grandparents, husbands, brothers, uncles, and nephews. Candles were lit, services held, and memorials erected. But nothing can bring back our lost heroes. Nothing can bring back these brave men for their families to whisper I love you's.

Coal Energy publishes this memorial as a tribute to these brave men who have left this earth far too soon.

May we all take a few minutes to remember the sacrifice these men made for us on a daily basis. May those of us in the industry realize that without miners such as these, we would not be sitting where we are today. Our jobs would not be possible without them.

As the memorial was put together I felt like I personally got to know these miners and their families one at a time. This is the purpose of this tribute. For you to get to know each and every miner who lost their life on this tragic day. For you to see them as individuals, and read about their families, hobbies and interests. For you to know them, not as one of the 29 miners, but instead have insight into each of their daily lives.

Worthy of mention is the reaction by the state of West Virginia surrounding the tragedy. What a rewarding experience to witness a state come together so closely in this time of sadness.

A special thank you to Governor Manchin III for participating in our memorial.

Upper Big Branch Mine did not only change the lives of the families involved. It changed the future of coal mining. It changed our lives forever. 🍷



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The mine tragedy that occurred on April 5, 2010, at Performance Coal's Upper Big Branch Mine in Southern West Virginia not only affected the citizens of our state, but people across our nation and around the world as well. The outpouring of support these families and our state received in the days, weeks and months following this tragedy is greatly appreciated and will never be forgotten.

The people of West Virginia are strong. Although the Montcoal community and the loved ones of the miners who were lost in the explosion are still healing, their resilience has demonstrated who we are and how we unite as a family in trying times. It's this support and love for one another that makes me proud to be a West Virginian.

The men we lost at Upper Big Branch also were strong. They were strong in stature and character; strong in love and courage. They were strong in their communities and in their commitment to their families. They were strong in their faith.

They were hard working, brave men who chose coal mining as their career. They had an unwavering commitment to provide a good living for their families, and a deep patriotic pride in the work they did that helped power the nation.

I have personally been through this type of tragedy, losing my uncle and many friends in the 1968 Farmington, West Virginia mine explosion. So, it is important to me, that those who do not know West Virginia's mining families come to understand the character and substance of these wonderful people who play such an important role in West Virginia and this great nation of ours.

During my administration we have passed historic mine-safety laws, but we still have a lot to accomplish. I have pledged to the families that we will find out what led to this devastating event and will do everything we can to ensure that it does not happen again.

We are making changes that will not only better protect each and every one of our miners, but workers in other industries across West Virginia as well. We owe it to our lost miners and their families, and to every worker in West Virginia, to make the workplace safer.

I want to thank everyone who has honored the memory of these brave individuals. Coal miners are the heart and soul of West Virginia, and they deserve our sincerest thanks. 🍎

Warmest regards,

Gov. Joe Manchin, III

In the following pages you will find a dedication to each of the 29 miners who lost their lives on April 5th 2010 at the Upper Big Branch Mine. Dedications include photos of each miner, loved ones whom they left behind, and what each of our heroes enjoyed doing when they were not mining for coal. Our heartfelt thank you to each and every man, husband, cousin, uncle, grandfather and father. Thank you for all of your hard work that provides us all with something we take for granted – energy. You will never be forgotten.

Carl Acord, 52
Jason Atkins, 25
Christopher Bell, Sr., 33
Gregory Brock, 47
Kenneth Chapman, 53
Robert Clark, 41
Charles Davis, Sr., 51
Cory Davis, 20
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Grover Skeens, 57
Benny Willingham, 61
Ricky Workman, 50

Average age of our heroes : 44 years
Oldest hero: 61
Youngest hero: 20



Carl Acord, 52

January 7th, 1958 - April 5th 2010.

Occupation: Miner

Length of time as a miner: 34 years

Length of time as a miner for Massey: 16 years

Family: Carl married Joyce Lynn in 1982. September 4th 2010 would have been their 28th wedding anniversary.

Children – Cody Acord, son; Casey Acord, son.

Grandchildren – Chase, 9 months; Cameron, 3 months.

Siblings – Diana Pendergrass, sister; Sheryl Grow, sister; Sherry Cline, sister.

Carl is also survived by his mother Jessie Acord.

Hobbies and Interests: Yard work, driving his tractor, fishing and spending time with his new grandsons being a PaPaw.



Jason Atkins, 25

September 19th, 1984 - April 5th 2010.

Occupation: Miner

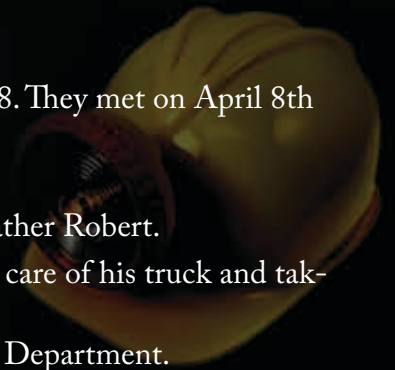
Family: Jason married Amanda Atkins June 28th 2008. They met on April 8th 2000.

Siblings – Chris Atkins, brother.

Jason is also survived by his mother Shereen and his father Robert.

Hobbies and Interests: Football, baseball, golf, taking care of his truck and taking care of his dog, Precious.

Jason was also a member of the Racine Volunteer Fire Department.





Christopher Lee Bell, Sr. 33

September 14th 1976 - April 5th 2010

Occupation: Miner

Family:

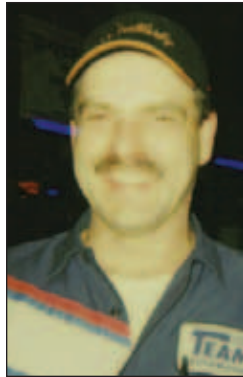
Christopher was married to Angela Grimmatt Bell.

Children – Alexis Bell, daughter; Meadow Bell, daughter; Christopher Lee Bell, Jr., son; Skylar Bell, son.

Siblings – Jason Bell, brother; Kristal Cook, sister.

Christopher is also survived by his mother Kathy and his father Christopher.

Hobbies and interests: Christopher loved to draw, and loved art and detailing vehicles, but most of all he loved to spend time with his wife and four children. He loved to play with his children.



Gregory Steven Brock, 47

January 8th 1963 - April 5th 2010

Occupation: Electrician

Length of time at Upper Big Branch: 10 years

Children – Gregory Kyle Brock, son ; Dixie Webb, daughter.

Grandchildren – Jenna Webb, Jillian Webb.

Siblings – Melba Williams, sister; Hilda Tolliver, sister; Noel Brock, brother ; Eric Brock, brother.

Gregory is also survived by girlfriend Patti Stover and her two children Shayla and Brooke.

Hobbies and Interests: hunting, fishing, NASCAR, planting and maintaining vegetable and flower gardens.

"I will never forget what a wonderful dad he was. He would always come home and some how with the little energy he had from slaving in the mines made time for me. I didn't realize what all he did for me till the explosion."

Greg Brock, son, Beckley WV - May 09, 2010





"I miss your smile and making you coffee. I remember those silly jokes and the serious talks, I cant believe you are gone but i think of you every minute of every day. You are a hero and we are all so sad that you are gone, it still doesn't seem real. When i see a deer i think of you, when i see a red leaf i think of the fall and it reminds me of you, and when i feel the wind blow i know that you will always be with me because i carry you in my heart!! I LOVE AND MISS YOU DADDY!!!"

Donna Griffith, oldest daughter, Beckley, WV July 27, 2010

Kenneth A. Chapman, 53

September 17th 1956 - April 5th 2010.

Occupation: Roof bolter within mines.

Family:

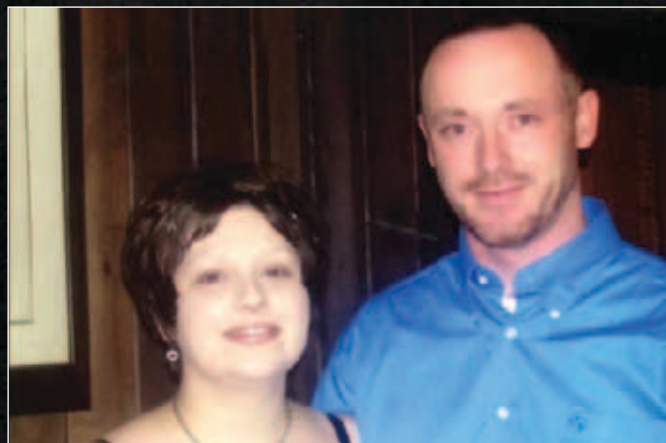
Kenny was married to Laura Chapman.

Children – Michael Chapman, son; Donna Griffith, daughter; Vicky Williams, daughter; Kenny Chapman, Jr., son; Jason McMillion, son; Carol Massey, daughter; Jubal McMillion, son.

Grandchildren – Matthew Griffith, Jr, Tristan, Rebecca, and Skyler Griffith, Bryonna and Bryce Chapman, Spencer Williams, Riley and Sydney Chapman, Haylen McMillion, Dakota, Jenna, and Hunter Massey, and Hope McMillion.

Siblings - Charles Chapman, brother; Glen Chapman, brother; Dennis Chapman, brother; Henry Chapman, brother; Larry Chapman, brother; Linda Frye, sister; Brenda Bailey, sister; Jimmy Chapman, brother; Ronnie Chapman, brother.

Hobbies and interests: hunting, four-wheeling, fishing, telling jokes, working in his garden, spending time with family.





Robert Eugene Clark, 41

February 20th 1969 - April 5th 2010.

Family:

Robert was married to Melissa Clark.

Children- Steven Robert Clark, son.

Siblings – Jennifer Underwood, sister; Elizabeth Taylor, sister; Barbara Adams, sister.

Robert is survived by his mother Linda and his father Leonard.

Hobbies and interests: spending time with family, riding his motorcycle, fishing, hunting, restoring vehicles, golfing, wood working, boating and mechanic work.



Cory Davis, 20

Occupation: Miner

Family:

Cory leaves behind his mother Cindy and his father Tommy.

He is also survived by the love of his life Emily Pritt.

Siblings: Seth Davis, brother; Nate Davis, brother.

Hobbies and Interests: Cory loved nature, hunting, fishing and putting his truck in the mud.



Charles Timothy Davis, Sr. 51

September 17th 1958 - April 5th 2010

Family:

Charles was married to Diana Davis.

Children - Timmy Davis Jr., son; Cody Davis, son; Misty Dawn Cooper, daughter.

Grandchildren - Caitlyn Davis, Hunter Cooper, Cadence Davis, Kyndall Cooper and Izabella Davis.

Siblings - Pam Napper, sister; Trina Crockett, sister; Tommy Davis, brother.

Charles is survived by his mother Linda and his father Charles.



Michael Lee "Cuz" Elswick, 56

September 17th 1958 - April 5th 2010

Occupation: Miner

Length of time as a miner: 36 years

Length of time at Upper Big Branch Mine: 4 days

Family:

Michael was married to Bobbie Elmore Elswick for 36 years.

Children: Jeremy Elswick, son; Jami Cash, daughter.

Grandchildren: Justin and Hannah "smooch" Cash.

Siblings: Pam Miller, sister; Larry Elswick, brother; Steven Elswick, brother.

Hobbies and Interests: Spending time with his grandchildren, being a supportive and loving family man. "Paw Paw was their rock, their go to guy" says his daughter Jami in reference to his grandchildren.





William "Griff" Griffith, 54

September 12, 1955 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner

Length of time as a miner: 35 years

Length of time at Massey: 18 years

Family:

Griff leaves behind his wife of 32 years, Marlene. They would have celebrated 33 years of marriage on April 30th.

Children: Deborah Lynn, daughter; William James, son.

Grandchildren: Caleb Ildon and Aubrey Jane.

Siblings: James Kelly Griffith Jr., brother; Michael Dewayne Griffith, brother; Douglas Mark Griffith, brother; Maria Claudette Hall, sister; Joyce Lynn Acord, sister.

Griff also leaves behind his mother, Mary.

Hobbies and Interests: Bobby and Marlene hunted and fished together, rode four-wheelers and enjoyed cruising in their 1967 maroon color Camaro. They would go to car shows and often place in the competition.



Steven J. Harrah, 40

February 27, 1970 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: Miner

Family:

Steven leaves behind his wife of 10 years, Tammy.

Children: Zachary Cole, son.

Siblings: Larry Harrah, brother; Gilbert Harrah, brother; Linda Mills, sister; Brenda Peterson, sister; Terry Harrah, sister; Betty Harrah, sister.

Hobbies and Interests: hunting, fishing, poker, proudly served in the US Army for 6 years.



Edward Dean Jones, 50

January 24, 1960 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: Miner

Length of time as a miner: 38 years

Length of time at Massey: 14 years

Family:

Edward leaves behind his wife Gina Jones. They would have celebrated their 16th wedding anniversary on May 27th 2010.

Children: Kyle Dean Jones, son.

Siblings: Judy Jones Petersen, sister; Cheryl Sue Jones, sister.

Edward also leaves behind his mother Ruby Nell Lafferty Jones.

Hobbies and Interests: Pittsburgh Steelers, and watching old westerns.



Richard Keith Lane, 45

July 14, 1964 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: Miner

Length of time at Massey: 4 years

Family:

Richard leaves behind his soul mate, Kim Parker, whom he married July 5, 1986.

Children: Robert (Rob) Parker Lane, son.

Grandchildren: Brody Parker Lane.

Richard also leaves behind his father, Mason.

Hobbies and Interests: Rick was an avid hunter and fisherman and lived for the day he could retire and work only on his farm.





William Roosevelt Lynch, 59

March 24, 1951 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: Miner, former teacher and coach

Length of time as a miner: over 30 years

Family:

William leaves behind his beloved wife of 36 years, Geneva. They met when she was just 16. They would have been married 37 years in June.

Children: Mon Lynch, son.

Grandchildren: Samiah and Jayla Lynch, Jasiah Rogers, and one grandchild on the way.

Siblings: Melvin Lynch, brother; Christiann Lynch, sister; Lillie Martin, sister.

Hobbies and Interests: He was active and faithful in the Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, Minden, where he served as a devotional leader, praise team leader. William also loved coaching and was an avid Dallas Cowboys fan.



Joe Marcum, 57

April 30, 1978 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: Miner

Length of time as a miner: 35 years

Family:

Joe leaves behind his wife Kathy Maynard Marcum. They were married for 39 years.

Children: Kathy Jo Marcum, daughter; Garnet Marcum Murphy, daughter.

Grandchildren: Shaunda Marissa Murphy, Josie Lynn Murphy and Laura Katherine Maynard.

Siblings: Sharon Carol Marcum, sister; Minnie Bowling, sister; Robin Bright, sister; Jean Parsley, sister.

Hobbies and Interests: Joe was a member of the Church of the Living God, a charter member of the Lenore Volunteer Fire Department since 1982, a volunteer firefighter and a former board member.



Ronald Lee Maynor, 31

April 30, 1978 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: Miner

Family:

Ron leaves behind his beautiful wife of 11 years, Helen, whom he was with for a total of 16 years.

Children: Kaitlyn Maynor, daughter; Hunter Maynor, son.

Siblings: Blake Maynor, brother; Ramona Williams, sister.

Ron also leaves behind his mother Nancy and his father Ronald.

Hobbies and Interests: fishing, hunting, spending time with family.



Nick McCroskey, 26

October 29, 1983 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: Civil Engineer

Family:

Nick was the son of Debra Lynn McCroskey.

Nick also left behind his grandparents, Julie and Darrell Worley.

Hobbies and Interests: Nicolas loved to hunt and fish, water sports, and loved his boat; he also enjoyed riding his Harley Davidson. He was a 2001 graduate of Wyoming East High School and a 2006 graduate of Bluefield State College.





James "Eddie" Mooney, 51

December 19, 1958 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner

Length of time as a miner: over 20 years

Family:

James leaves behind his beloved wife of 33 years, Sheila Mooney.

Children: Misty Case, daughter; Austin Mooney, son.

Siblings: six brothers and sisters and their spouses, Butch and Peggy Mooney, Chuck and Sharon Mooney, Patty "Sissy" and Wendy Woodrum, Punk and Karen Mooney, Agnes Love and Ginny and Michael Graley.

James is also survived by his mother Ruby.

Hobbies and Interests: He was a member of Rumble Community Baptist Church. Eddie loved life and he loved to make people laugh. He was a hard worker and he always put his family first. He enjoyed taking his son hunting and fishing. He also liked camping and four-wheeling. On the weekends he loved to take his 1978 Corvette out for a cruise.



Adam Keith Morgan, 21

May 10, 1988 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner

Family:

Adam leaves behind his mother Tammy and his father Steve.

Siblings: Josh Morgan, brother.

In addition to his family, Adam leaves behind his girlfriend Kate Smallwood.

Hobbies and Interests: Adam enjoyed hunting, fishing, four-wheel riding, grilling and being outdoors. He also enjoyed coal mining, going to WVU ballgames and being with his family and friends.



Rex Lane Mullins, 50

February 1, 1950 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner

Family:

Rex leaves behind his wife, Brenda.

Children: Jason Mullins, son; Geneva Mullins Blake, daughter; three stepchildren, Jeremy Walker, Tessa Walker and Joseph Walker.

Grandchildren: Kailey Rose Mullins, Emma Grace Mullins, Dominic Walker, Kristen Crawford and Kolton Dorsey.

Siblings: Clay Mullins, brother; Yancy Mullins, brother; Sherry Scurlock, sister; Kassie Smith, sister.

Rex also leaves behind his mother Joan.

Hobbies and Interests: He attended the Pax Advent Christian Church. He was an avid outdoors man and a Mountaineer fan.



Joshua Scott Napper, 25

August 22, 1984 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner, nurse

Family:

Josh lost his life alongside his uncle, Tim Davis, and his cousin Corey Davis, both of whom were also inside the Upper Big Branch Mine.

Josh left behind his mother Pam and his father Scott.

He also left behind his fiancée Jennifer Ziegler.

Children: Jenna Leigh Napper, daughter.

Siblings: Amanda Justice, sister.

Hobbies and Interests: He was a 2002 graduate of Meigs High School and a 2006 graduate of the Hocking Tech. Nursing School. He was an avid body builder and an avid football fan of The Ohio State University and the Miami Dolphins. He loved the outdoors, camping, 4-wheeler riding and golfing, and he loved to dance. He worked as a nurse at Hickory Creek Nursing Home and he loved his patients and cared deeply for them. He attended the Rutland Church of God and dedicated his life to Jesus and was baptized by Pastor Ron Heath.



Howard "Boone" Layne Jr, 53

Occupation: miner

Length of time at Massey: 12 years

Family:

Children: Jason Payne I, son; Erica Stanley, daughter.

Grandchildren: Marissa and Jayden Stanley, River and Jason Payne II, Brennan Young, Chloe Hall and Sky and Tyler Sovine.

Siblings: Shirley Whitt, sister; Sherry Keeney; sister.

Boone is also survived by his father Howard Daniel Payne Sr.

Hobbies and Interests: a member of Charleston Moose Lodge 1444 and he loved to hunt, fish and play basketball.



Dillard Persinger, 32

October 16, 1977 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner

Length of time at Massey: 2 years

Family:

Dillard leaves behind is beloved wife, Heidi.

Children: James Persinger, son; Devin Persinger, son.

Siblings: Dale Persinger, brother; Janet Reed, sister; Rita Stover, sister.

Dillard also leaves behind is mother Ada and his father Delmas.

Hobbies and Interests: Persinger was a country music fan who especially loved listening to Hank Williams Jr. and George Jones.



Joel R. "Jody" Price, 55

December 1, 1954 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner

Family:

Jody leaves behind his beloved wife Dorean.

Children: stepsons, John Jones, Alan Johnson, and Matt Jones.

Grandchildren: Peyton Jones, Myron Johnson, Jasmine Johnson, Caleb Johnson, Malcolm Johnson, Amiya Johnson, and Trenton Jones.

Siblings: Thorton E. Price Jr., brother; George E. Price, brother; John L. Price, brother; Richard D. Price, brother; Garland D. Price, brother; Kenneth G. Price, brother; Jeffery A. Price, brother; Argyle L., sister; Rovena Ward, sister; Patrelia A. Lewis, sister.

Hobbies and Interests: Joel served in the U.S. Navy for four years and was a member of Saint John United Holiness Church.



Gary Wayne Quarles, 33

July 1, 1976 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner

Family:

Gary is the son of Gary and Patty Quarles.

Children: Trevor Quarles, son; Rebekka Quarles, daughter.

Hobbies and Interests: His hobbies included hunting, fishing and riding four-wheelers with his dad and children.





Deward Allan Scott, 58

October 17, 1951- April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner

Family:

Deward was married to Crissie Lynn Scott.

Children: Jennifer Ann Scott, daughter; Daniel Allan Scott, son.

Grandchildren: Kayla, Nicki, Jacob, Nicholas, Christopher, James and Matthew, and one grandchild on the way.

Siblings: Dallas Scott, brother; George Scott, brother; Danny Scott, brother; Melvin Gregory Scott, brother.

Hobbies and Interests: He was an avid outdoorsman who loved to hunt and fish. He was a U.S. Army veteran.



4/5/10



Grover Dale Skeens, 57

October 16, 1977 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner

Family:

Children: Renee Bishop, daughter; Jeff Skeens, son.

Siblings: Shirley Massey, sister; Judy Lailer, sister; Gwen Thomas, sister; Gary Skeens, brother; Bucky Skeens, brother.

Hobbies and Interests: He was a Christian, a coal miner, and a Marine veteran.





Benny Ray Willingham, 61

May 14, 1948 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner

Length of time as a miner: over 30 years

Length of time at Massey: 17

Family:

Benny was married to Edith Mae (Edie Mae) Prillaman Willingham.

Children: Michelle McKinney, daughter; Jody Canada, son; Patrick Canada, son.

Grandchildren: Tiffany Michelle Ellis, Kyle Benjamin Ellis, Travis Daniel McKinney, Jodi Chantel Canada, Austin Reid Canada, and McQuade Lee Canada.

Siblings: Jeannie Sanger, sister; Judy Walls, sister; James Willingham, brother; Jerry Willingham, brother; Joe Willingham, brother; Danny Sloane, brother.

Hobbies and Interests: He was a veteran of the US Air Force, having served his country during the Vietnam Era. He was a coal miner with 30 plus years of service and a member of UMWA. Benny was a faithful member and deacon of the Mullens Family Worship Center. He was a loving husband, father, grandfather, and a devoted brother in Christ. Benny's first priority was serving the Lord. He loved his family and enjoyed nothing more than watching his grandchildren play sports. He loved to bowl and was an avid weight lifter.





Ricky Workman, 50

July 4, 1959 - April 5, 2010

Occupation: miner

Family:

Ricky leaves behind his beautiful wife of 15 years, Annette.

Children: Monica White, daughter; Heather Whitt, daughter; Chantal Hale, daughter.

Grandchildren: Hailey, Isaiah, Tyler, Cameron, Amara, and Ethan.

Hobbies and Interests: He loved playing with his kids and grandchildren. He was also a Harley Davidson enthusiast and loved go-cart and nitrous car racing.





April 25th 2010 Memorial Service

We're here to memorialize 29 Americans: Carl Acord. Jason Atkins. Christopher Bell. Gregory Steven Brock. Kenneth Allan Chapman. Robert Clark. Charles Timothy Davis. Cory Davis. Michael Lee Elswick. William I. Griffith. Steven Harrah. Edward Dean Jones. Richard K. Lane. William Roosevelt Lynch. Nicholas Darrell McCroskey. Joe Marcum. Ronald Lee Maynor. James E. Mooney. Adam Keith Morgan. Rex L. Mullins. Joshua S. Napper. Howard D. Payne. Dillard Earl Persinger. Joel R. Price. Deward Scott. Gary Quarles. Grover Dale Skeens. Benny Willingham. And Ricky Workman.

Nothing I, or the Vice President, or the Governor, none of the speakers here today, nothing we say can fill the hole they leave in your hearts, or the absence that they leave in your lives. If any comfort can be found, it can, perhaps, be found by seeking the face of God -- -- who quiets our troubled minds, a God who mends our broken hearts, a God who eases our mourning souls.

Even as we mourn 29 lives lost, we also remember 29 lives lived. Up at

4:30 a.m., 5:00 in the morning at the latest, they began their day, as they worked, in darkness. In coveralls and hard-toe boots, a hardhat over their heads, they would sit quietly for their hour-long journey, five miles into a mountain, the only light the lamp on their caps, or the glow from the mantrip they rode in.

Day after day, they would burrow into the coal, the fruits of their labor, what so often we take for granted: the electricity that lights up a con-

vention center; that lights up our church or our home, our school, our office; the energy that powers our country; the energy that powers the world.

And most days they'd emerge from the dark mine, squinting at the light. Most days, they'd emerge, sweaty and dirty and dusted from coal. Most days, they'd come home. But not that day.

These men -- these husbands, fathers, grandfathers, brothers

sons, uncles, nephews -- they did not take on their job unaware of the perils. Some of them had already been injured; some of them had seen a friend get hurt. So they understood there were risks. And their families did, too. They knew their kids would say a prayer at night before they left. They knew their wives would wait for a call when their shift ended saying everything was okay. They knew their parents felt a pang of fear every time a breaking news alert came on, or the radio cut in.

But they left for the mines anyway -- some, having waited all their lives to be miners; having longed to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and their grandfathers. And yet, none of them did it for themselves alone.

All that hard work, all that hardship, all the time spent underground, it was all for the families. It was all for you. For a car in the driveway, a roof overhead. For a chance to give their kids opportunities that they would never know, and enjoy retirement with their spouses. It was all in the hopes of something better. And so these miners lived -- as they died -- in pursuit of the American Dream.

There, in the mines, for their families, they became a family themselves -- sharing birthdays, relaxing together, watching Mountaineers football or basketball together, spending days off together, hunting or fishing. They may not have always loved what they did, said a sister, but they loved doing it together. They loved doing it as a family. They loved doing it as a community.

That's a spirit that's reflected in a song that almost every American knows. But it's a song most people, I think, would be surprised was actually written by a coal miner's son about this town, Beckley, about the people of West Virginia. It's the song, Lean on Me -- an anthem of friendship, but also an anthem of community, of coming together.

That community was revealed for all to see in the minutes, and hours, and days after the tragedy. Rescuers, risking their own safety, scouring narrow tunnels saturated with methane and carbon monoxide, hoping against hope they might find a survivor. Friends keeping porch lights on in a nightly vigil; hanging up homemade signs that read, "Pray for our miners, and their families." Neighbors consoling each other, and supporting each other and leaning on one another.

I've seen it, the strength of that community. In the days that followed the disaster, emails and letters poured into the White House. Postmarked from different places across the country, they often began the same way: "I am proud to be from a family of miners." "I am the son of a coal miner." "I am proud to be a coal miner's daughter." They were always proud, and they asked me to keep our miners in my thoughts, in my prayers. Never forget, they say, miners keep America's lights on. And then in these letters, they make a simple plea: Don't let this happen again. Don't let this happen again.

How can we fail them? How can a nation that relies on its miners not do everything in its power to protect them? How can we let anyone in this country put their lives at risk by simply showing up to work; by simply pursuing the American Dream?

We cannot bring back the 29 men we lost. They are with the Lord now. Our task, here on Earth, is to save lives from being lost in another such tragedy; to do what must do, individually and collectively, to assure safe conditions underground -- -- to treat our miners like they treat each other -- like a family. Because we are all family and we are all Americans. And we have to lean on one another, and look out for one another, and love one another, and pray for one another.

There's a psalm that comes to mind today -- a psalm that comes to mind, a psalm we often turn to in times of heartache.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

God bless our miners. God bless their families. God bless West Virginia. And God bless the United States of America.



Montcoal Memorial

April 12, 2010 - State Capitol - Gov. Joe Manchin and First Lady Gayle Manchin join state and federal representatives, family members of lost miners and hundreds of West Virginians who gathered at the coal miner statue at the State Capitol to honor the memory of those killed at the Upper Big Branch Mine-South disaster on April 5th 2010.





Washington, D.C. – At the request of U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV), the House of Representatives honored the 29 coal miners who lost their lives in the deadly explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine.

The House approved by 409 to 0 a Congressional Resolution (H. Res. 1236) Rahall introduced with Reps. Alan Mollohan (D-WV) and Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV). Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the Chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, which has jurisdiction over mine safety, also cosponsored the resolution that honored the coal miners who perished in the mine, extended condolences to their families, and recognized the valiant efforts of emergency response workers at the mine disaster.

Rahall made the following statement on the House floor today in honor of the fallen miners:

“Last week, on Monday, April 5th, an explosion tore through the Upper Big Branch Mine in Raleigh County, West Virginia, taking the lives of 29 good, hardworking men. It was the repeat of a recurring nightmare that has haunted the coalfields of our Nation for generations and it is a tragedy that never should have occurred.

“Immediately upon receiving news of the explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine, I rushed to the site. It was, for me, unfortunately, not an unfamiliar circumstance. I have spent too many anxious hours in the aftermath of mine accidents in the midst of family and friends and coworkers awaiting word.

“The watching, hoping, and praying for survivors to emerge from the darkness into the arms of their loved ones is a heart-wrenching exercise. But being surrounded by such warmth, and love, generosity and faith is heartwarming. The people of coal mining communities – in particular those of southern West Virginia – are a special breed.

“Generations of these families go into the mines. For so many of these miners, it is not just a job; it is a call-

ing. They live with the knowledge that there is risk, but they are proud to take that risk to labor in the company of good and loyal friends to earn an honest paycheck in order to provide for their families and themselves.

“The miners at Upper Big Branch were just such men. Like coal miners throughout the ages, they did difficult work in dangerous circumstances. They labored underground, in cramped conditions, in the damp and the dark. But outside the mines, their lives were full of light and love and joy. They had wives and children and grandchildren. They hunted. They pranked and they laughed. They experienced warm memories and gentle sorrows.

“And while most Americans can scarcely imagine what a coal miner’s day of work is really like, we certainly appreciate what their labors have meant in our daily lives.

“The toil of these coal miners – of all coal miners – has fueled our nation’s economic engine and ensured our military security by providing coal not just for the generation of power but as an essential element in the steelmaking process.

“These coal miners are deserving of our gratitude and of our renewed commitment to ensure that such tragedies never occur again.





“By all accounts, the explosion that took the lives of these 29 miners should never have happened this time, in this modern era.

“To quote Mine Safety and Health Administration’s Administrator for Coal Mine Safety and Health Kevin Stricklin: “All explosions are preventable. It’s just making sure you have things in place to keep one from occurring... it’s quite evident that something went very wrong here.”

“There are multiple layers of laws and regulations in place to prevent such a disaster. There are modern technologies. There were repeated, persistent inspections. And yet, 29 men perished.

“That this deadly explosion occurred is infuriatingly, frustratingly heartbreaking and I am determined that we will get to the bottom of it and ensure that steps are taken to prevent a recurrence of this type of explosion. We owe it to the miners who perished in Raleigh County

last week. We owe it to their families. We owe it to their coworkers.

“With that inner strength that comes to the West Virginia people, we will get through this tragedy together. We will hold accountable those who failed our miners, so help me God.

“Today, the House of Representatives honors the 29 miners lost in Raleigh County last week. We express the condolences of our Nation to their families and recognize the valiant efforts of the rescue workers who answered the call that day.

“May the Good Lord keep our lost miners, may he care for their families and bless those rescue personnel who risked their own lives in service to others. And may he watch over each and every coal miner who continues to walk in the wake of risk in service to our nation.”

Candlelight April 7th Memorial Service

Miami, W.Va. - Gov. Joe Manchin and First Lady Gayle Manchin join hundreds of West Virginians at Sharon Daves Elementary School to remember and honor the miners who lost their lives in April 5th's explosion at Upper Big Branch mine in Montcoal, West Virginia.



The United States Senate passed a resolution honoring the 29 miners.

All 100 senators cosponsored the legislation.

“I thank my colleagues for their condolences and joining us in mourning West Virginia’s tragic loss of life,” said U.S. Senator Robert Byrd in a prepared statement. “This is not just a West Virginia tragedy, this is a national tragedy, and it will require a national response. I am also heartened that President Obama delivered a strong statement condemning the safety lapses and the break down in enforcement, and promising an aggressive and thorough investigation into this horrible and preventable tragedy.”

U.S. Senator Jay Rockefeller echoed those comments. “The passage of this resolution honors our brave and heroic coal miners and promises that their dedication to their families and our entire nation will never be forgotten. The resolution gives us time to pause and reflect on the sacrifices of those who work in dangerous underground conditions to preserve America’s quality of life. Their tenacity, their courage and their determination to keep America strong and the electricity on is an inspiration to us all—their sacrifice must be honored and I thank my colleagues for supporting this resolution unanimously to do so.”

Resolution

Honoring the coal miners who perished in the Upper Big Branch Mine-South in Raleigh County, West Virginia, extending the condolences of the United States Senate to the families of the fallen coal miners, and recognizing the valiant efforts of the emergency response workers.

Whereas coal mining is a time-honored profession;

Whereas coal miners and the families of coal miners have shaped the rich history and culture of the State of West Virginia and the United States;

Whereas the United States is greatly indebted to coal miners for the difficult and dangerous work performed by coal miners to provide the

fuel necessary to keep the United States strong and secure;

Whereas the United States has long recognized the importance of health and safety protections for coal miners laboring in extreme and dangerous conditions;

Whereas accidents in coal mines have repeatedly taken the lives of coal miners;

Whereas, following an explosion on April 5, 2010, 29 coal miners from the State of West Virginia tragically perished in the Upper Big Branch Mine-South;

Whereas the explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine-South was the worst coal mining disaster in the United States during the 40

years prior to the date of the agreement to this resolution;

Whereas Federal, State, and local rescue crews worked tirelessly in a courageous rescue and recovery effort after the explosion;

Whereas the families of the fallen coal miners have suffered an immeasurable loss; and

Whereas residents of Raleigh County and the State of West Virginia came together to support the families of the fallen coal miners: Now, therefore, be it

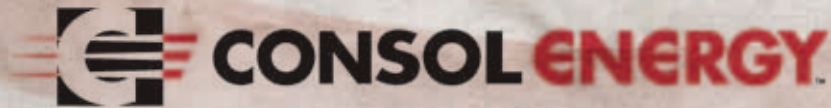
Resolved, That the Senate—

- (1) Recognizes the ultimate sacrifice made by the 29 coal miners lost at the Upper Big Branch Mine-South in Raleigh County, West Virginia;
- (2) Extends the deepest condolences of the United States Senate to the families of the fallen coal miners;
- (3) Honors the survivors of the tragedy;
- (4) Recognizes all coal miners for—
 - (A) Enduring the immeasurable loss of coworkers; and

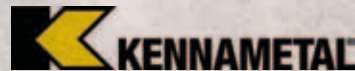
- (B) Maintaining courage in the aftermath of the explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine-South;
- (5) Commends the valiant efforts of the emergency response workers searching for the missing coal miners after the explosion; and
- (6) Honors the many volunteers who provided support and comfort for the families of the missing coal miners during the rescue and recovery operations.

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who have made
this memorial possible”*

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