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**Opening Statement of Rep. Bradley Byrne (R-AL)  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Workforce Protections  
Hearing on “Reviewing the Policies and Priorities of the  
Mine Safety and Health Administration”**

Good morning, and welcome to today’s subcommittee hearing. I’d like to thank our witness, David Zatezalo (Zah-tez-lo), Assistant Secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health, and our members for joining today’s important discussion regarding the policies and priorities of the U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA).

Mining is not only essential for America’s homes and businesses; it is an essential industry for the economy. This is an industry that literally keeps the lights on, and it deserves our gratitude.

Workers in the mining industry have been the unsung heroes of the American economy, and thanks to President Trump, many Americans are being reminded of how much we rely on miners on a daily basis.

In 2017, more than 319,000 Americans were employed by the mining industry, and we must ensure they have a safe and healthful workplace.

We ask so much of these hardworking Americans, and vital policies are in place to provide them with the safest environment possible.

For the federal government, this task falls on MSHA. Created by the *Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977*, it is the duty of MSHA to establish and enforce regulations governing all mining activities both above and below ground.

Of course, safety is very important to the mining industry as well, and we commend the large majority of law-abiding companies in the industry who do the right thing.

Mine safety remains a major priority for this Committee, and we are particularly interested in how the federal government is regulating the mining industry to ensure the highest standards of safety while also allowing the industry to innovate for the benefit of mine workers and the American economy.

Among other issues, today's hearing will examine the regulatory agenda of MSHA, and how MSHA intends to work with all industry stakeholders to promote the best possible policies and practices that protect mine workers and encourage economic growth.

Unfortunately, this was not always the stance of MSHA in recent years.

America is seeing a new age of innovation and enthusiasm in the mining industry. The Trump Administration has made clear that it will promote policies that recognize the economic importance of the mining industry, and this Committee intends to play a key role in these efforts.

Congress will continue to work with all of the relevant stakeholders in order to create and promote policies that improve the safety and overall strength of the mining industry.

We urge this administration, as we did the prior administration, to hold bad actors accountable. At the same time, MSHA should direct its focus towards a more collaborative approach with the mining industry to address worker safety.

The American mining industry plays a major role in driving the American economy, and will continue to do so. We look forward to hearing from Assistant Secretary Zatezalo—who I should add is a former miner himself—in order to understand the current state of workplace safety within the industry, and what can be done to strengthen American mining and protect the safety of mine workers.

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