

Testimony of Eric Carter

Education and Workforce Committee Hearing

“Protecting Workers and Powering America: The Future of Mining”

May 8, 2026

Chairman Walberg and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Eric Carter, and I have worked for 32 years in mining. During that time, I was asked to return to school and complete a degree. I currently hold an associate’s degree in general studies and am currently pursuing my bachelor’s in business administration. I have completed several different certifications that allow me to manage mines in Indiana and Illinois. I was certified as a first responder, dust technician, gas sampling technician, and in different management techniques.

During this time, I have gained extensive experience working with current laws in Title 30 of the Code of Federal Regulations and other policies under the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA). I am here to testify about my experience with the current available workforce and the state of education available for mining practices. It is my opinion that, over time, education standards and certain policies under the Department of Labor (DOL) have hampered the ability of the mining community.

Currently, in my community, schools cater primarily to employers outside of the mining industry. Here in Gibson County, that employer is Toyota. Many people in the school system perceive mining to be less than favorable. Educators recognize the need for different engineering disciplines, yet mining is rarely highlighted as a destination for those

graduates. We currently utilize mechanical, electrical, mining, civil, environmental, and software engineers. Not all high school graduates will attend college, yet the mining industry provides opportunities ranging from general labor to managerial positions for any individual with the wherewithal to learn and progress. Over my 32 years in mining, I have been given several opportunities to grow within my field and organization. It was always up to me to take the initiative to seize those opportunities and succeed.

The mining industry as a whole is facing a significant and growing workforce shortage. According to the National Mining Association, the sector will need to fill tens of thousands of positions over the next decade as experienced workers retire and domestic energy and mineral demands continue to rise. Coal, aggregates, and mineral operations alike are competing for a shrinking pool of qualified applicants, which poses a direct threat to domestic energy security, infrastructure supply chains, and the communities that rely on mining-related employment. Addressing that gap requires coordinated efforts among industry, educational institutions, and policymakers to develop a sustainable pipeline of trained mining professionals at every level.

What we see today is a culture shift among students and individuals who have newly entered the workforce. Once a person is hired, we must train them to a level of ability sufficient to function at a very basic level before meaningful productivity can begin. The hours in mining are long and strenuous on the body, even when properly prepared for the work that is being performed. The earning potential is very high, creating a strong middle-class opportunity. There does not appear to be a clear or well-promoted pathway for high school graduates to navigate their way into the trades, including mining. We spend a

significant amount of time sufficiently training and developing new workers compared to 10 years ago. This additional new-hire development time is causing production delays as well as creating safety concerns.

Several workforce training programs currently exist that could help address these challenges, but they remain underutilized. MSHA offers training grants under its State Grants Program, which funds state-level mine safety and health training efforts. Programs such as those offered through the National Mine Rescue Association and various community colleges in mining regions provide hands-on instruction in mine rescue, ventilation, roof control, and equipment operation. Some states have established apprenticeship programs in coordination with mining companies that allow new hires to earn while they learn under the supervision of experienced miners. Additionally, the DOL's Registered Apprenticeship program can be adapted to the mining industry, providing a structured pathway from entry-level employment to skilled trades certification.

On April 23, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 14278, "Preparing Americans for High-Paying Skilled Trade Jobs of the Future," which directs the Secretaries of Labor, Commerce, and Education to align federal resources with the reindustrialization needs of the American economy and to develop a plan to reach one million new active apprentices. The mining industry is precisely the kind of sector this EO was designed to support, and I encourage federal agencies to ensure that mining occupations are explicitly included in the implementation of this policy. On the legislative front, Chairman Walberg's A Stronger Workforce for America Act of 2026 (H.R. 8210) offers a complementary opportunity. Recently passed out of committee, this bill would reauthorize the Workforce

Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and includes provisions to better align workforce programs with employer needs, strengthen accountability, create a critical industry skills fund, establish a new Youth Apprenticeship Readiness Grant Program, and automatically qualify Registered Apprenticeship providers as eligible training providers under WIOA. I thank Chairman Walberg for this legislation and encourage Congress to advance his bill. These resources, when properly implemented and promoted, represent a viable solution to the recruitment and readiness gap we are currently experiencing.

Perhaps the most pressing challenge is one of perception. Mining has long carried a stigma in many communities; it is viewed as dangerous and without a future. This perception is outdated and inaccurate. Modern mining operations are highly technical, increasingly automated, and held to rigorous environmental and safety standards under MSHA oversight. A career in mining today can mean operating sophisticated equipment, managing complex logistics, working in environmental compliance, or leading teams of skilled professionals. The earning potential is among the highest available to workers without a four-year degree, and the career stability that comes with supplying minerals and energy to the American economy is considerable. Changing this public perception, starting in our schools and communities, is critical to protecting our domestic mining industry. Policymakers and educational leaders should partner with the mining industry to develop outreach programs, career days, and curriculum that present mining as the dynamic and rewarding profession it truly is.