



COMMITTEE STATEMENT

Opening Statement of Rep. Ryan Mackenzie (R-PA), Chairman
Workforce Protections Subcommittee
“Examining the Policies and Priorities of the Mine Safety and Health
Administration”
January 22, 2026

(As prepared for delivery)

We all share the goal of keeping hardworking Americans safe. Today’s hearing examines the federal agency responsible for ensuring the safety of the men and women who help to power our nation,

The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) establishes and enforces safety and health standards governing all mines—both above and underground. We are joined today by the Honorable Wayne Palmer, the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health at the U.S. Department of Labor, who will share the Trump administration’s vision for MSHA.

Assistant Secretary Palmer was confirmed by the Senate on October 7, 2025. Prior to his appointment, he served as executive vice president of the Essential Minerals Association. He also served in the first Trump administration at MSHA, including as Principal Deputy Assistant

Secretary and, for a time, Acting Assistant Secretary. He also served as chief of staff to a Senator from my home state, Senator Rick Santorum.

This marks the first time in six and a half years that the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health has testified before this Committee, and I commend the Committee for holding this important hearing and welcoming Assistant Secretary Palmer today.

Mining plays a critical role in supporting our economy and America's energy independence. As a representative of the great Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which has more than 700 active mines, I've seen firsthand how this industry supports jobs, families, and local economies. Under the Trump administration, there is opportunity for mining to grow and continue delivering for communities across the country.

Last year, President Trump issued several executive orders aimed at increasing domestic mineral and coal production. As production expands, our responsibility is clear: we must ensure worker protections keep pace. That is where MSHA comes in. MSHA must promote and implement strong and effective policies so that every mine worker can finish his or her shift and return home safely to their loved ones.

While MSHA oversees the health and well-being of workers in this unique industry, it also faces the challenge of protecting workers from hazards common in other industries—such as respirable silica—and hazards that are unique to mining, such as black lung disease. Given his leadership experience at MSHA and his background in the mining industry, Assistant Secretary Palmer is well-equipped to confront these issues.

Going forward, MSHA must uphold strong safety standards while also supporting innovation as technologies and operational demands evolve. This can be achieved by pairing focused, effective enforcement with a strong compliance assistance program that promotes collaboration among employers, workers, and MSHA. By working together, we can develop practical, commonsense policies that prioritize safety and worker wellbeing.

Assistant Secretary Palmer, thank you for being here today, I look forward to your testimony.