

STATEMENT OF
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE PROTECTIONS
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & WORKFORCE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

January 22, 2026

Good morning/afternoon, Chairman Mackenzie, Ranking Member Omar, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify here today. It is an honor to appear before this subcommittee and to represent President Trump, Secretary of Labor Chavez-DeRemer, and the Mine Safety and Health Administration. As a descendant of both coal and metal/nonmetal miners, it is a privilege to serve as the twelfth Assistant Secretary for MSHA, and I can think of no mission more vital than ensuring the day-to-day safety and long-term health of our nation's 325,000 miners.

Vision for Mine Safety and Health

Being called to appear this early in my tenure as Assistant Secretary, I thought it would be helpful to share with you my initial vision for how I believe MSHA should fulfill its mission of preventing death, illness, and injuries from mining and promoting safe and healthful workplaces for the Nation's miners.

In accordance with Executive Order 14219, which directs agencies to focus limited enforcement resources on regulations squarely authorized by statute, MSHA will prioritize statutorily mandated mine inspections under the Mine Act—at least two full inspections each year at surface mines and at least four at underground mines annually, our twos and fours as we call them—along with accident investigations and mine rescue operations. I am pleased to report that in 2025, MSHA completed its mandatory inspections, conducting 20,054 such inspections at 12,289 mines. While inspecting those mines, this administration will call balls and strikes, and when mine operators commit errors, we will cite and penalize according to the Mine Act's strict liability standard, evenhandedly, without fear or favor.

We also will seek to modernize the agency, in two ways. The first is through technological advancements. When I served as MSHA's Deputy Assistant Secretary during the first Trump administration, we launched an aerial drone program for inspecting high-hazard impoundments using 3-D imaging, enabling our inspectors to identify structural deficiencies in tailings dams from a safer distance. We also pioneered an artificial intelligence platform capable of predicting real-world mine safety risks based on decades of inspection and investigation data. As I sit here today, we are further refining this AI platform and will integrate its predictive data into inspector-worn smart helmets that we soon will pilot across six mines. When implemented, these technologies will guide MSHA field staff to focus on the most likely risks and hazards when inspecting mines, and for mine operators to identify and mitigate safety and health risks during day-to-day operations between MSHA inspections. Second, wherever possible we will modernize agency regulations. During the first Trump administration, for example, we updated existing rules to accommodate advancements in electronic detonators, which minimize accidental misuse during blasting in a mine. Last June and July, as a part of the President's robust deregulatory agenda, MSHA published 19 Notices of Proposed Rulemaking intended to remove outdated or inconsistent requirements; reduce regulatory burdens without compromising miner health and safety; facilitate compliance; and modernize safety and health practices. Additionally, the administration is committed to safeguarding miners' health and is working on a limited rulemaking to reconsider and seek comments on portions of the 2024 final Silica Rule.

Responding to Trends in the Mining Industry

I take the helm at an especially important, dynamic moment for America's mining industry, as the Trump administration implements policies to improve American competitiveness and address downstream affordability for consumers of finished goods and energy. Through decades of complacency, we as a nation grew dependent on nondomestic mineral supply chains, including from countries hostile to our economic and security interests.

This administration is vigorously pursuing policies aimed at reshoring those supply chains and making America dominant again. Where the previous administration granted FAST-41 expedited permitting status for the coordinated federal environmental review of infrastructure projects under title 41 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act to only a single new mining project, the Trump administration has granted such status to 13 additional projects focused on critical minerals already during its first year. Where the outgoing administration imposed a moratorium on coal lease sales, the Trump administration is moving to increase them. A recent Congressional Review Act resolution formally nullified the moratorium, ensuring that a future administration cannot create a permanent moratorium through the rulemaking process.

These are just two examples of actions that will lead to new mines and increased production at existing mines, with the International Energy Agency reporting that strong policy support already boosted domestic demand for coal in 2025. What does this mean for MSHA as an agency?

Last July, MSHA developed the Compliance Assistance in Safety and Health (CASH) Program to provide compliance assistance primarily to new mine operators and inexperienced miners. During 2025, our Educational Field and Small Mine Services (EFSMS) provided nearly 32,000 hours of compliance assistance to mine operators. Such assistance is especially helpful to new mines when they enter their exploration and development phase, and MSHA already has established contact with 22 mining startups assigned FAST-41 status, and others that have not received such status. As of the New Year, MSHA has assisted 93 new or reopening mines with regulatory compliance, helping them avoid thousands in fines and more swiftly commence operations. How better to ensure safety than to help a new mine prepare for regulatory compliance before MSHA shows up unannounced for that mine's first statutorily-mandated inspection? From an organizational efficiency perspective, it means situating our resources strategically to accommodate future growth. The vast majority of mines in development fall west of the Mississippi, and MSHA needs to be resourced accordingly, into the future.

Again, the Trump administration's chief goal, in the spirit of America First, is to reshore mineral production and eliminate our vulnerability to global supply chain disruptions. But it is also important to recognize that such policies will generate stable, well-paying jobs. Mining, of course, occurs mostly in rural areas, oftentimes in communities that rely on a much smaller host of employers and opportunities than urban areas can offer. Wherever new mines arise, or expanded production at existing mines occurs, as an agency MSHA will strive to ensure safe and healthful workplaces for all of America's miners.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering any questions that members of this subcommittee may have.