

TESTIMONY OF  
RICHARD STICKLER, CMSP  
NOMINEE FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF LABOR  
FOR MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
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Mr. Chairman, Senator Kennedy, and members of the Committee, I would like to thank the Committee for inviting me here today. I am honored to be here, and humbled by the President's confidence in me to lead this critical agency.

Mr. Chairman, you can read my resume to learn about my qualifications for this job. I believe I have the background and experience to do this job.

But, I sincerely welcome this opportunity to tell you why I want to come out of retirement to accept this position if I am confirmed by the Senate.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Kennedy, I have been an underground miner. I was in the mines before the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act was passed. I can attest to the fact that mines are safer today because of MSHA. I am committed to this law.

I was also a member of a mine rescue team. I participated in attempts to rescue brother miners.

In 1968, I was working underground adjacent to the Farmington Mine when a methane gas explosion claimed the lives of 78 miners. The sights and sounds of that experience as well as other tragic mine accidents will be with me as long as I live.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Kennedy, I know what it feels like to lose men - friends and co-workers - in tragic mine accidents. I have great empathy for those at Sago and Aracoma Mines who have so recently felt this same loss. There is nothing worse.

As a mine superintendent and as a state regulator, I know what it is like to face the families. With all due

respect, no congressional hearing could be as gut-wrenching as that.

Some people have asked me why I still want this job given the heightened public scrutiny that MSHA is under. They know me well -- they know that I am not one for the spotlight.

I want this job because I have "been there," and I believe that I can contribute something positive to this agency and its mission. I want nothing more than to see mine fatalities and injuries continue to fall.

I have had the opportunity over the course of my career to work at almost every level of the mining industry. I have been a rank and file miner, foreman, and superintendent. I have experience managing large and small mining operations, including the largest underground coal mine in the nation. I have managed operations with various safety challenges.

My passion for addressing these challenges does not, by itself, solve safety problems. I follow an analytical approach to identify the causes for accidents. With others on my team, I develop systematic solutions, set improvement goals, and measure results.

These solutions have included improving safety and health through the implementation of innovative engineering, new technology, safety training, and participative management processes. It goes without saying that adherence to safety standards is also key.

I chose to leave the mining industry in 1997 to serve as Director of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Deep Mine Safety (BDMS), where I served for six years. The decision to accept this position was based on my desire to serve the remainder of my career focused specifically on improving mine safety and health.

This is also my reason for accepting the President's nomination to this critically important position at the Department of Labor.

Throughout my career, I have witnessed legislative improvements as well as increased funding for mine safety and health, and I thank you for that. As a result, we have seen tremendous improvement in mine safety and health, but

the job isn't done until we can prevent tragic outcomes like Sago and Aracoma Mines.

I feel indebted to the thousands of miners I have known, including my father and my grandfather. If I am confirmed, I will do my best to honor the legacy of those who have labored to provide fuel for our nation. And, I would appreciate the chance to work with the President, the Secretary of Labor, and the Congress to reach new levels of safety in our nation's mines.

Thank you.