

My name is Stanley “Goose” Stewart and I actively worked as an underground coal miner for 34 years, until the explosion of the Upper Big Branch Mine in Montcoal, West Virginia. I worked at UBB since it was bought by Massey in 1995. I was 300 feet underground heading to my section to begin my job as a Continuous Miner Operator when the explosion happened.

I lost 29 of my friends that day and experienced the trauma of giving CPR to men that had families, friends and lives that closely resembled my own. I had to stack their bodies and cover them with blankets. I sat and looked at them for hours waiting for ambulances to come and take those 7 bodies of the men who I had just tried to save. I still see their faces, covered in layers of soot so black that I couldn’t tell one man from another. I still have nightmares about that day and my entire family is still hurting from that one moment in history.

I have personally seen the consequences of a coal company neglecting to follow the laws as they are written today. Massey continually blatantly disregarded the laws by camouflaging things when mine inspectors would be onsite or to get permission to operate after being shut down. After the inspectors would leave, the company would go back to their unlawful acts.

Coal companies today are making large amounts of profit. It would be absurd to weaken the mine regulations and the enforcement capabilities of state and federal mine inspectors unless Congress and large corporations don’t mind seeing more tragedies like that of April 5, 2010. It wouldn’t have to be a tragedy that reaches national attention with scores of miners killed. It could be one killed today or two next month. These deaths are the result of rogue operators “gaming” the system and not obeying the mine laws. If we want to protect our miners the laws need strengthened and the people with the power to enforce these laws need to have more authority to ensure they are enforced. Using regulations as way to give these companies more control and workers less rights equals death or injury for millions of working Americans.

In regard to the mine rescue chambers or refuge alternatives, I would like to state my feelings about those. I have trained on the use of these containers and I am well aware of their capabilities. Although they may not be needed very often, if they are needed they will work. Had they been in place during the Sago disaster, those men would have lived. If the explosion at UBB had not been so massive as to kill my friends on site, those men would have lived if they had made it to one of those chambers. If they can save one man or two dozen they are worth it. The cost is minimal to save one life.

There is no more miserable place to die, in my opinion, than a coal mine. The coal operators can make tremendous amounts of money and still ensure the safety of the men and women who mine coal for their profit. My wife told me that the only thing that gave her hope during April 5<sup>th</sup> was the thought that if I were underground, that I had made it to one of those chambers. During those terrible hours of her grief and uncertainty when information was nonexistent, she had that last bit of hope that I was sitting in that chamber waiting to be rescued. The comfort to a coal miner’s family to hope that their husband, brother, son or father could be safe in one of those chambers is worth more than any money, greed or profit.

You were elected to represent the American people, but more importantly, you are Americans and at the very base of it all, you are human beings. The safety of your American people should mean more to you than extra profits for big corporations. It seems wrong to justify the filling of corporate bank accounts with the blood of American workers and the tears of their families.

I am just one man whose opinion is against many corporate and industry “experts”; but I’m a man who has seen things that no man should see. I’m a man who has had to experience things no human should live through. I am suffering the result of a large company disregarding regulations set by law that were written in the blood of those coal miners who died in the past. These regulations that some say should be disregarded are in place to ensure the safety of millions of Americans.

Regulations shouldn’t exclude profits. In my opinion it would save American jobs and American companies. How can a company make a profit if it is paying out settlements or defending itself against

lawsuits? Wouldn't it help Americans to have a safe environment to work so the large corporations don't close due to worker injury and wrongful death lawsuits? Wouldn't having regulations in place ensure that companies have something to go by to know they are doing all they can to keep their employees safe? If a company sends its jobs overseas to countries that don't care about the safety of their workers, the companies will make a profit, but Americans will lose jobs. Isn't that what you are trying to avoid?

I urge everyone to consider the result of your actions. Regulations do not cut into profit; they protect the people who work to create a profit for a company.

Thank you,  
Stanley Goose Stewart, Coal Miner  
Orgas, West Virginia