

**July 21, 2010**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) -- Today, U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) voted for legislation that will strengthen our nation's mine safety laws and help to prevent disasters like the Upper Big Branch mine tragedy. The Mine Safety and Health Act (H.R. 5663) was approved by the House Education and Labor Committee by a vote of 30-17 and is expected to be voted on by the full House next week. As a member of the House Education and Labor Committee, Congressman Altmire has actively worked to improve mine safety and has participated in several Congressional hearings examining the issue.

**“The Upper Big Branch mine tragedy made it clear that we have to do a better job of holding mine operators accountable for serious safety violations,” Congressman Altmire said. “This new legislation will give the Mine Safety and Health Administration the tools it needs to ensure that bad actors in the mining industry improve workplace safety. Given the important role mining plays in our region’s economy, we must ensure that we are doing everything we can to make these operations as safe as possible.”**

During today's markup of the Mine Safety and Health Act, Congressman Altmire emphasized the importance of restoring pre-contest conferences. Before they were phased out in 2008, these conferences provided the mining industry and the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) the opportunity to resolve disputes over safety violations before a civil penalty was assessed, a process which both parties have said works well. MSHA has said that restoring pre-contest conferences could help the agency reduce the significant penalty contest backlog it now faces.

MSHA is currently finalizing the details of a pilot program that would bring back pre-contest conferences. Congressman Altmire is committed to monitoring the pilot program's implementation and working with MSHA and Congress to expand it as quickly as possible.