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Special to The Courier-Journal

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Bill Caylor is president of the Kentucky Coal Association.

Published March 25, 2009

'True mine safety reforms ignored'

By Bill K. Caylor

Special to The Courier-Journal

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Senate Bill 170, which only would have allowed Kentucky coal mine inspectors to get credit for mine rescue team certifications while they conducted inspections of coal mines. This was opposed by the United Mine Workers only because it gave Kentucky an economic advantage over other coal states.

House Bill 119, which would have given small coal operators relief from having to provide two Mine Emergency Technicians (even though every coal miner receives training in first aid) at all times. With a small work force of 10 to 12 miners, if an MET is sick or otherwise absent, the whole workplace will be shut down.

Senate Bill 64, which would have kept Kentucky's mine ventilation plans identical to the federal mine safety agency's mine ventilation requirements. Industry simply wanted consistency in state and federal requirements.

What was missed were two very important safety measures. House Bill 452, which coordinated coal mining and gas well drilling, and House Joint Resolution 119, which mandated Emergency Action Plans for coal fly ash and coal slurry impoundments.

House Bill 452 was possibly the biggest mine safety bill to pass in years. While the so-called safety bills of 2006 and 2007 were highly touted, they provided little or no preventive action but merely addressed response to accidents that had already occurred. HB 452 was designed to act as a "fail safe" to actually prevent accidents underground by keeping our underground continuous mining machines from cutting into unknown gas wells. HB 452 also requires more gas line markers on the surface to keep bulldozer operators from accidentally severing a buried gas line.

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