“Our gratitude goes to the team at MSHA and the other rescue workers – Federal and State employees who worked together seamlessly to save lives... We are grateful for your courage, perseverance and heart!”

Elaine L. Chao, Secretary of Labor
Nine for Nine

“The best of America was also represented in the technology and know-how of our mine safety folks — those who, on a moment’s notice, used their skill to devise a way to save life. Took a look at the situation, reacted to the environment, predicted what might happen miles below the earth, and responded. And then rallied others. They set up a plan and a strategy…. our folks are world-renown for mine rescue, and the nation saw why — and there are nine lives here to testify that we’re some of the best at rescuing our fellow citizens.”

President George W. Bush

The rescuers took on obstacles that appeared insurmountable: pumping out 50 million gallons of water from a flooded mine shaft, drilling a 240 foot escape shaft through ground that included 150 feet of rock, and assessing numerous scenarios and providing for contingencies, such as rescue officials adding U.S. Navy personnel with their nine hyperbaric decompression chambers to the rescue effort. Time could not be wasted in deliberations. The rescue had to be done quickly in the face of a ticking clock with nine lives hanging in the balance.

Twelve hours after the rushing water had blocked their exit, a six-inch pipe broke through, carrying warm air and the hope of rescue to the trapped miners. Late Saturday evening, at 10:16 p.m., the drill bit boring the shaft for the escape capsule that would carry the nine miners to the surface finally broke through. The first miner emerged from the rescue capsule at 1:00 a.m. and on Sunday, July 28th at 2:45 a.m., the ninth miner reached the surface — all, remarkably, were alive and safe.