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Mystery in the Mines

A report by the General Accounting Office discloses that the Administration has been taking a strangely unbearing attitude toward collecting fines assessed against mine operators for violation of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act. Of \$12.5 million in penalties levied under this landmark law to reduce the devastating toll of mine accidents, the Bureau of Mines has forgiven \$2.7 million outright and actually collected only \$1.4 million of the balance.

What makes this lackadaisical record particularly deserving of closer official scrutiny is that the former lobbyist who served as the bureau's chief assessment officer quit that post last June to join the Nixon campaign staff as a strategist for the Committee to Re-elect the President. With so many mysteries already enveloping that committee in connection with unreported campaign contributions, an independent inquiry is clearly in order to determine whether there is any link between election help and slack enforcement of the statute enacted in 1969 over vehement industry opposition.