I have seen recent testimony by Amy Dean, Executive Officer of the South Bay AFL-CIO Labor Council, given at one of the Department’s ergonomic standard hearings. I believe this testimony illustrates the real life consequences of not protecting workers in this nation from ergonomic hazards and so I include it in the Congressional Record for the information of my colleagues.

TESTIMONY OF AMY B. DEAN, EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SOUTH BAY AFL-CIO LABOR COUNCIL, JULY 24, 2001

My name is Amy Beth Dean and I am the Executive Officer of the South Bay AFL-CIO Labor Council. Eventually, she began noticing more than 100,000 working families throughout Silicon Valley.

In this community, there are union members in every occupation. We work in manufacturing. We work in construction. We work in health care. We look after young children. We’re even the people who keep this building clean.

But far more important than any of those differences in the work we do, are the values we all share—values that begin with the belief that we have the right to a safe and healthy workplace. That’s why I’m here today.

A number of years ago a British journalist once wrote that, “in politics, being ridiculous is more damaging than being extreme.” By destroying OSHA’s ergonomics standard—and then stacking those forums in favor of big business—the Bush Administration has demonstrated itself to be both. And American workers are paying for George Bush’s extremism every single day.

Since George Bush and the Republicans in Congress killed this safety standard, more than 500,000 workers have suffered carpal tunnel syndrome and other injuries. That’s one more worker every 18 seconds.

What kinds of workers are we talking about? Some of them are people who work in poultry processing plants. Some work with heavy equipment. Others work in places like nursing homes and warehouses. But many of these women and men work in high technology industries, including medical and technical workers. Many are professionals.

They’re people like Patricia Clay. She works at the Referral Center at the Kaiser Medical Center. She worked for five years at a desk that was too high. She raised the issue with her supervisor, but her employer was indifferent.

Eventually, she began noticing that something was wrong with her right hand. She found out it was carpal tunnel syndrome. Eventually, she lost so much strength that, after a while, she couldn’t hold anything over two pounds. That meant she couldn’t even pick up the baby grandson she was helping her daughter to look after. A week ago, Patricia Clark had surgery, but she couldn’t even pick up the baby grandson she was helping her daughter to look after.

The fact is that far too many employers still believe they don’t have an obligation to provide safe and healthy working conditions. Employers who would rather see workers wear wrist splints or undergo physical therapy, or even suffer through surgery than invest in computer keyboards that are safe to use.

It’s the women and men working for those kinds of employers who need this ergonomic standard most of all. And those are the very people George Bush chose to betray.

I know that three questions are being asked of those participating in these forums. You’ve asked what is an ergonomics injury. You’ve asked how OSHA can determine whether an ergonomics injury was caused by work.

And you’ve asked what the most useful and cost effective government measures are to address ergonomic injuries. It seems to me that if the Department of Labor reviewed the 10 years of research and expert testimony it compiled to draft the ergonomics standard it could find the answer to those and many other questions.

Instead, I have a fourth question I would like to ask this Administration. When a young newspaper reporter’s hands are numb after hours of typing at an obsolete keyboard, who is going to help her to drive her car?

When a baby cries out in the middle of the night and the pain in her mother’s arms and hands is so severe from working at an obsolete keyboard that she can’t reach down to lift that child from her crib and that young mother is left standing there with her heart breaking, who will be there to comfort her baby?

Will it be the company she works for? Will it be Secretary Chao? Or will it be George W. Bush?

I have no further comments.