

News
From _____

CONGRESSMAN

Nick Rahall

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Washington D.C. --- U.S. Representative Nick Rahall (D-4th), today toured the Black Lung Division of the Department of Labor and said, "In many ways this country hasn't even scratched the surface in helping miners inflicted with black lung disease, attempts are being made however, to improve the process."

"After my visit today, I plan to intensify my efforts to see the Black Lung Reform Act of 1977 passed by Congress," Rahall stated.

Under Secretary of Labor Donald Eilsberg accompanied Congressman Rahall on the visit. Eilsberg will be in Beckley, WV on Friday with Congressman Rahall to visit black lung clinics there.

"Since July 1973 when the Black Lung Division began operation, 107,000 claims have been filed with a large bulk of the claims coming from West Virginia," Rahall said. "Of those claims filed, 58,000 have been reviewed, leaving a backlog of about 50,000 claims."

"The most shocking aspect of these figures," Rahall went on to say, "is that only 4,000 black lung claims have been approved in almost 4 years of the Divisions existence, which amounts to only 7%!"

Congressman Rahall learned that the average processing time for a claim is 630 days. "A miner could die of the disease before his or her claim is even reviewed," Rahall stated.

"What is worse," Rahall pointed out, "is that the American taxpayer is being overburdened by paying for a bulk of the claim processing."

"At the present time, only 138 coal companies nation-wide are paying out black lung benefits. The Federal government has to pay for the long and exhausting review process that we see can last for almost 3 years."

The Black Lung Reform Act of 1977, which is now before the House of Representatives, would set up a Black Lung Trust Fund to pay benefits. "Coal companies throughout the nation will have to pay 30¢ on a ton of mined coal, into the trust fund," Rahall stated.

Rahall also learned that a new claim processing operation will go into effect August, 1977. "This new operation should cut the review time to about 90 days per claim," Rahall observed.

Rahall concluded that the back-log of claims, should be acknowledged by the end of the year.