FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE   CONTACT: Mike Serpe
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Washington D.C. --- U.S. Representative Nick J. Rahall (D-4th), said today that hearings will begin Monday, March 14, on the Black Lung Reform Act of 1977.

"I have been in contact with Congressman Carl Perkins (D-Ky.), Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, and he has informed me that he expects quick action on this very important piece of legislation."

Congressman Rahall, a sponsor of the measure, said one of the bill's main purposes is, "To reduce the federal liability for paying of benefits to those miners and their survivors disabled by black lung."

Rahall went on to say, "This will be accomplished by establishing an operator financed trust fund from which claims will be paid. The fund will be financed by an excise tax imposed upon each ton of coal produced."

"The most important aspect of this legislation is the elimination of the offset provision," Rahall said. "This will allow individuals now receiving black lung benefits, to also receive their full state workmen's compensation."

The legislation also makes the Black Lung Benefits program a permanent federal program. Currently the program is scheduled to end in 1981.

Rahall said, "I have been in contact with many Black Lung Associations throughout West Virginia, asking them if they would like to testify before the Committee." Rahall will personally testify in support of the legislation.

The Black Lung Reform Act of 1977, also contains a provision Congressman Rahall has been pushing.

"The Labor Department's process for reviewing black lung claims is grossly inefficient. The Department's own statistics show that 51,200 claims dating back to 1973 have not yet been reviewed," Rahall stated.

"I am pleased that the Reform Act will contain a section to provide for additional hearing officers to review and process the backlogged claims."

A similar bill was passed by the 94th Congress, but was not acted upon by the Senate.

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