

RAHALL Weekly Report

BETTER ENVIRONMENT AND MORE JOBS IN THE NATION'S COALFIELDS

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OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 23, 1983

● Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing the "Abandoned Mine Reclamation Improvements Act"; legislation which seeks to improve the environment and create badly needed jobs in the Nation's coalfields.

Great levels of unemployment in the coalfields are causing severe economic disruption in regions dependent on the coal industry. In Appalachia, over 35 percent of the United Mine Workers' union membership are on the unemployment rolls and this figure becomes much higher when nonunion coal miners are included.

There is a way to create some employment for these workers; employment in an area in which they already possess the skills needed to undertake the job. While the coal industry is experiencing soft markets, idle coal miners can be put to work reclaiming abandoned coal mine lands. If these miners cannot be mining coal, they can at least be employed through reclamation projects.

The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 created the abandoned mine reclamation fund which is supported by a reclamation fee assessed on every ton of mined coal. The objective of this fund is to support programs aimed at reclaiming orphaned coal mine lands. However, in spite of the fact that a vast inventory of abandoned mine lands exist in coal-producing States a large unappropriated balance remains in the fund. By the end of fiscal year 1982, \$904.4 million had been collected by the reclamation fee and the unappropriated balance was \$315.5 million. The SMCRA designates 50 percent of the fund as the State share, and as such, half of the \$904.4 million collected—\$452.2 million—is for State reclamation programs. Of this amount, only \$92.2 million had been distributed to the States with the State share unappropriated balance being \$360 million. The following chart shows how the \$92.2 million was obligated:

(in millions)

States/Tribes	Amount collected for State share through Sept. 30, 1982	State share fund obligated through Sept. 30, 1982
Alabama	\$14.1	\$4.0
Alaska	.6	
Arizona		
Arkansas	.2	
California		
Colorado	11.8	1.2
Georgia	.073	
Illinois	31.6	4.9
Indiana	22.3	6.8
Iowa	.5	
Kansas	.9	
Kentucky	79.7	15.9
Louisiana		
Maryland	2.2	.6
Michigan		
Mississippi		
Missouri	4.5	3.5
Montana	21.6	7.0
New Mexico	7.9	.8
North Dakota	3.7	
Ohio	26.3	12.5
Oklahoma	4.3	1.6
Pennsylvania	51.2	11.2
Rhode Island		
South Dakota		
Tennessee	5.3	1.2
Texas	6.4	
Utah	4.3	
Virginia	15.6	7.7
Washington	3.8	
West Virginia	47.9	13.3
Wyoming	68.0	
Crow Tribes	3.1	
Hopi Tribes	1.1	
Navajo Tribes	15.0	
Total	\$452.2	\$92.2

The \$360 million in unappropriated State share reclamation funds would support 18,000 full-time jobs in the coalfields. Yet, it is expected the abandoned mine reclamation fund's unappropriated balance will continue to grow. Because the majority of coal-producing States now have federally approved reclamation plans and due to the inherent problems of the current grants system of distributing these funds, I am introducing the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Improvements Act which will provide for a more expeditious distribution of State share funds. My bill will enable the Secretary of the Interior to automatically pay to the States their share of the fund on a quarterly, or at the election of the State, an annual basis.

This legislation retains Federal oversight on the use of these funds and makes provision for the proper use of these funds by providing for an enforcement mechanism.

In addition, my bill would allow interest to accrue to the fund. At present, the abandoned mine reclamation fund—defined by SMCRA as a trust fund—is the only Federal trust fund in which interest does not accrue. The hazardous waste and toxic spill superfund, the highway trust fund, the airports and airways trust fund, and the inland waterways trust fund all allow interest. These trust funds are supported by specific user fees or taxes not unlike the reclamation fee assessed on every ton of mined coal which supports the abandoned mine reclamation fund.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation offers us the opportunity to not only provide for a better environment in coal regions, but to also create jobs.●