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RAHALL PLEDGES TO FIGHT COAL IMPORTS

Washington, D.C. -- U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) has announced that one of the first bills he will introduce when Congress reconvenes in January will be aimed at limiting coal imports.

Citing the growing tonnage of imported coal entering the country, Rep. Rahall charged that increased reliance on foreign coal by domestic electric utilities will eventually displace West Virginia coal markets and lead to further unemployment in the Appalachian coalfields.

The level of coal imports--for the most part originating in South Africa and Columbia--doubled in 1983 to 1.3 million tons with most of this coal being delivered to electric utilities on the Gulf and East Coasts.

"Relying on these countries for coal to supply electric plants is sort of like walking down an icy sidewalk with a drunk," Rep. Rahall said, "it's very risky."

"The U.S. is not on the best of terms with South Africa which employs slave labor to mine coal. Due to this politically volatile situation, at any time utilities which purchase their coal may be cut-off," Rahall stated. "The same goes for Columbia whose most notable export to the U.S. is coke--but not the type made from metallurgical coal used in steelmaking." He added, "I would hope the U.S. never finds itself dependent on a country such as this, rather than West Virginia, for its coal needs."

The proposed Rahall bill would place a tariff on coal imports. At this time, the U.S. does not assess a tariff on imported coal which enters the country duty-free.

"Essentially, we are talking about trade reciprocity," Rahall said. "Most U.S. coal exports face duties and other trade constraints in the international market."

He added, "We cannot afford a replay of what has happened in the steel industry. We must make a stand here and now for our domestic industry before these imports throw our coal miners out of work."