



JAY ROCKEFELLER,
U.S. SENATOR FOR WEST VIRGINIA

NEWS

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ROCKEFELLER PRAISES RAHALL

ON BLACK LUNG-COAL PASSAGE

WASHINGTON -- Senator Jay Rockefeller today praised Congressman Nick Joe Rahall for his leadership role in preserving the Black Lung Trust Fund while averting a major tax increase on the coal industry.

At Rahall's urging, the House of Representatives yesterday resisted pressure from the White House and Senate Republican leadership and passed legislation securing the trust fund's fiscal solvency without imposing a 50 percent increase on the coal excise tax.

"A major obstacle has been removed -- not only for Appalachian coal miners and their families, but for our coal industry as a whole," Rockefeller said in a statement released by his Washington office.

"Black lung claimants can rest easier knowing that the House has acted to keep the trust fund intact. And coal operators should be relieved that the House has refused to hit them with a big -- and unwarranted -- tax increase.

"Congressman Rahall deserves much credit for guiding this bill through the House. He was instrumental in winning an uphill fight against formidable odds.

"I will work hard to convince my Senate colleagues to follow suit," he said.

An earlier legislative proposal in the House had included a provision to raise the coal excise tax by 50% in order to restore the solvency of the Black Lung Trust Fund. With the assistance of Minority Leader Robert C. Byrd, Rahall and Rockefeller have led an intensive fight in recent months to replace this provision with a measure increasing the excise tax by only ten percent -- a move which has been endorsed by the United Mine Workers and the Bituminous Coal Operators.

Late last year, the Rahall-Rockefeller compromise was adopted as one element in a huge "budget reconciliation" bill by a key House-Senate conference panel. Unfortunately, the compromise was then stalled when action was postponed until agreement could be reached on the entire piece of legislation.

Despite the House-Senate compromise reached in December, the White House yesterday tried to reinstate the 50% coal excise tax. The Administration move, which had the backing of the Republican Senate leadership, was rejected by the House. The reconciliation bill containing the Rahall-Rockefeller compromise language passed the House yesterday 314-86.

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