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CONGRESSMAN

Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

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RAHALL SAYS WEST VIRGINIA TOPS \$100 MILLION IN RECLAMATION MONEY

WASHINGTON D.C. - U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-W.Va.) today announced that over \$100 million has been spent on abandoned coal mine reclamation activities in West Virginia since enactment of the 1977 federal surface mining act, and added that the state is entitled to receive another \$17 million in reclamation construction money this year.

"We have been extremely successful over the years in obtaining project construction money from the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund," Rahall noted after his Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources conducted an exhaustive oversight hearing on the program. "Logan County for example, has received more than \$25 million and Wyoming County is the site of the largest mine refuse reclamation project in the United States."

As the 10th anniversary of the enactment of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act approaches, the Rahall Subcommittee reviewed progress made to date and searched into the question of whether the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund should be reauthorized after its 1992 expiration date. The fund is financed by a fee collected on every ton of coal mined. Projects undertaken are aimed at mitigating health, safety and environmental threats such as sealing old mine openings, removal of abandoned mine structures, reclamation of unstable materials, extinguishment of mine fires and the abatement of acid mine drainage and subsidence problems.

"The program has the dual benefit of improving the quality of the environment for the people of West Virginia and throughout the Appalachian Region, while at the same time providing a means for additional employment due to reclamation construction activities," Rahall said.

During the hearing, the Department of Interior announced that it is changing its policy regarding the use of reclamation funds for water supply systems.

"This is a great victory for many areas of West Virginia because we have problems in certain regions where the water supply has been contaminated by abandoned deep mine operations," Rahall stated. "I fully intend to help obtain reclamation funds for this purpose."

In light of the fact that only a portion of all abandoned coal mine problems in the state will be reclaimed by the 1992 expiration date of the program, Rahall sought comments on whether Congress should reauthorize the fund.

While a national representative of the coal industry did not express support for reauthorization, Ben Greene of the West Virginia Mining and Reclamation Association stated support for an extension conditioned upon certain changes being made to the program.

"West Virginia is again leading the nation in matters pertaining to the surface mining act," Rahall said. "We have always had one of the best regulatory programs in the country and our coal industry is showing a great deal of social responsibility by supporting continued contributions to the reclamation effort."