

Rahall stresses strength of state tourism, tobacco

By Bob Stiegel
Staff Writer

R/H 1/10/88
P.1A

He'll still talk coal, but these days Nick Joe Rahall is more likely to focus on tourism and tobacco when discussing potentials for the Fourth Congressional District.

U.S. Rep. Rahall, visiting his hometown of Beckley Saturday, said his recent efforts in Washington have still targeted the coal industry. But he said he's under no illusion that coal, especially in southern West Virginia, will ever return to boom times.

"The coal industry is in a changing nature," he said. "Production, I believe, is going to increase ... but unfortunately the production is going to be done by new machines."

"The out-of-work miners are realizing that they're not going to go back in the mines, no matter how much production increases. That's why things like tourism are so important to develop."

Rahall, who has served in the House of Representatives since 1977, used Saturday's visit to officially announce his bid for a seventh straight two-year term. Only 38, he currently ranks 137th in seniority out of 435 House members.

"I enjoy it. It's a challenge," he said about his 11 years in Congress. "It's not your normal 9 to 5."

Rahall, who was expected to seek re-election, also is expected to score a large majority among vot-



Rep. Nick Joe Rahall

ers in his eight-county district. As always, however, he refused to call himself a shoe-in.

"I don't take any opponent lightly," said Rahall, who for now has no announced opposition.

Like several other politicians, Rahall has refocused attention from coal to the area's tourism potential. And he believes he scored well this past session on its behalf, nursing two bills to passage.

The first gives additional envi-

ronmental protection to the Bluestone, Gauley and New rivers, while the second calls for \$17.5 million to be spent on the proposed New River Parkway.

"It could be a couple of years, but the money's there," Rahall said. "There's no holdup on the federal end."

Another \$600,000 was secured, he said, to begin engineering work on the parkway that will follow the same route as W.Va. 20 from Sandstone Falls to Athens.

While he didn't enter legislation dealing with the tobacco industry, Rahall is giving it more attention. Next week he plans to address a tobacco industry lobby and hopes to lure its business to the state, he said.

"I want to let them know we have it in West Virginia," he said.

Two Fourth District counties — Cabell and Wayne — grow tobacco, and Rahall is now armed with such statistics as tobacco accounting for 2 percent of the state's workforce and 2.8 percent of its gross product.

"It's not much," he concedes, "but nevertheless it's something, and we can develop it further."

Other topics discussed during Saturday's interview:

■ His \$8 per ton tariff on imported coal — Rahall said he tried to sneak the measure into December's budget reconciliation bill, but

(Please see **Rahall on 12A**)

Rahall ■ Continued from 1A

it was removed after being noticed. "Exxon pointed it out to a friendly congressman who pointed it out to the Rules Committee," he said. The congressman, he said, was Rep. Sam Gibbons of Florida, whose district is home to a utility that uses coal shipped from Colombia.

■ Further attempts to assist captive coal shippers — Rahall said a bill, after four years of battle, was finally passed by the "hostile" Subcommittee on Energy and Transportation and now will go to full committee. The measure requires railroads to document in detail, if they can, how they justify rising rates and mandates the Interstate Commerce Commission to afford more appeals to captive operators served by only one rail.

■ "We're telling the ICC that they have to hear their (appeal) case," Rahall said. "The ICC has just run roughshod over congressional intent."

■ Economic Development Seminars — The congressman, who introduced the meetings last year, said he plans to hold more local seminars for small businesses and organizations this year. The seminars feature visiting officials from

various federal agencies who explain how to go about applying for federal funds.

■ "Even in today's tough budgetary times, there are still dollars around," Rahall said. "People see these agencies not as cold bureaucracy that they've been afraid of in the past, but as intelligent, caring individuals who want to help West Virginia."

■ Presidential candidates — Rahall wouldn't say what Democrat he'll endorse, but indicated it will be Illinois Sen. Paul Simon. Simon has asked him to head his campaign in West Virginia, Rahall said, but he is still considering the offer.

■ He has talked coal more than any other candidate," Rahall said.

■ His frequent trips and speeches paid for by lobby groups — Rahall said he has been unfairly singled out by a Charleston newspaper, which he called the "Daily Enquirer," and that all of his trips are documented and justified.

■ "They make it sound like I'm the only one in the delegation who takes trips or gives speeches," he said. "They accept honoraria, too."